

AMERICA FRANCE

My Friend's Book

(Le Livre de Mon Ami)

A TRANSLATION

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My Friend's Book

(LE LIVRE DE MON AMI)

BY

Anatole France

TRANSLATED BY ROSALIE FELTENSTEIN



Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

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PART ONE

First Conquests

1. *The Monsters*

People who have told me that they remember nothing of the early years of their childhood have surprised me greatly. As for me, I have retained very vivid memories of the time when I was a very small child. These are, it is true, isolated images, but, by that very fact, they* stand out with all the more brilliance against an obscure and mysterious background. Though I am still rather far from old age, these memories, which I love, seem to me to come from an infinitely distant past. I imagine that then the world was in its magnificent newness and completely clad in fresh colors. If I were a savage, I would think the world as young, or, if you wish, as old as I. But I have the misfortune not to be a savage at all. I have read many books on the antiquity of the earth and the origin of species, and I compare with melancholy the brief duration of individuals to the long duration of races. I well know that it was not very long ago that I had my crib in a big room in an old, very run-down house, which has since been torn down to make room for the new buildings of the School of Fine Arts. It was there that my father lived, a humble doctor and a great collector of natural curiosities. Whoever said that children have no memory? I still see it, that room, with its green, flowered wallpaper,

*Literally: which

and a nice colored engraving which depicted, as I learned later, Virginia crossing the ford of the river Noire in the arms of Paul. I had some extraordinary adventures in that room.*

I had, as I have said, a little crib, which stayed all day in a corner and which my mother, every night, put in the middle of the room, doubtless to bring it closer to her [bed], the immense curtains of which filled me with fear and admiration. It was quite a job to put me to bed. There had to be pleadings, tears, embraces. And that was not all: I used to escape in my nightshirt and jump about like a rabbit. My mother would catch me under a piece of furniture to put me to bed. It was fun.

But hardly had I gone to bed when some persons who were complete strangers to my family began to file past me. They had noses like a stork's beak, bristling mustaches, pot bellies, and legs like those of a rooster.† They showed themselves in profile, and marched past, carrying brooms, spits, guitars, syringes, and some unknown instruments. Ugly as they were, they ought not to have shown themselves; but I must give them their due: they slipped along the wall noiselessly, and not one of them, not even the littlest and the last, ever took a step toward my bed. Some power clearly held them back against the walls, along which they glided without displaying any appreciable solidity. That reassured me a bit; besides, I was keeping watch. It is not in such company, as you well know, that one closes one's eyes. I kept my eyes open. But, yet (that is another marvel), suddenly I would find myself in the bedroom, again full of sunshine, seeing only my mother in her rose dressing gown, and not understanding at all how the night and the monsters had gone away.

*Literally: Extraordinary adventures happened to me . . .

†Literally: . . . legs like the feet of a rooster

"What a sleeper you are!" said my mother, laughing. Indeed, I must have been a mighty sleeper.

Yesterday, while strolling along the quais, I saw in a print-seller's shop one of those collections of grotesques in which Callot of Lorraine employed his clear, precise pen, and which have become rare since my childhood. A print-seller, Mother Mignot, our neighbor, used to cover a whole wall with them, and I used to look at them every day, going out for my walk and returning. I used to feed my eyes on these monsters, and when I went to bed, I used to see them again without having the wit to recognize them. That rascal Callot!

The little collection which I leafed through aroused in me a whole world which has vanished, and I felt it rising in my soul like a fragrant dust through the midst of which pass beloved shadows.

2. The Lady in White

In those days, two ladies lived in the same house as ours, two ladies, one of whom dressed entirely in white, the other entirely in black.

Do not ask me if they were young; that was beyond my understanding. But I know that they smelled nice and that they had all sorts of fine things. My mother, who was very busy and who did not like to go visiting neighbors, hardly went to their house. But I used to go often, especially at tea time, because the lady in black would give me cakes. So I made my visits alone. You had to go across the courtyard. My mother would watch me from her window, and would rap on the panes when I would lose myself too long in watching the coachman curry his horses. It was quite a job to climb the staircase with the iron bannister, the high steps of which had by no means been made for my short

legs. I was well rewarded for my trouble as soon as I entered the ladies' room, for they had there a thousand things which plunged me into an ecstasy. But nothing equaled the two grotesque porcelain statuettes which were seated on the mantelpiece, on either side of the clock. By themselves, they nodded their heads and stuck out their tongues. I learned that they came from China and promised myself to go there. The difficulty was to get myself taken there by my nursemaid. I had become certain* that China was behind the Arch of Triumph, but I never found a way to get that far. There was also in the ladies' room a flowered carpet on which I used to roll about with pleasure, and a little couch, soft and deep, out of which I would sometimes make a horse or a carriage. The lady in black, a bit plump, I believe, was very sweet and never scolded me. The lady in white was impatient and blunt†, but she laughed so prettily. We got along well together, all three of us, and I had made up my mind that only I would ever come into the room with the statuettes. The lady in white, to whom I announced this decision, made fun of me a bit, so it seemed to me, but I insisted, and she promised me everything I wanted.

She did promise. One day, however, I found a gentleman seated on my couch, his feet on my carpet, and chatting with my ladies with an air of satisfaction. He even gave them a letter which they returned after having read it. That displeased me, and I asked for some sugar water because I was thirsty and also so that they would pay attention to me. Sure enough, the gentleman looked at me.

"He is a little neighbor," said the lady in black.

"His mother has only this one, isn't that so?" replied the gentleman.

*Literally: I had acquired the certitude . . .

†Literally: had her impatiences and her bluntnesses . . .

"That is so," said the lady in white. "But who let you know that?"

"It is because he has the look of a badly spoiled child," answered the gentleman. At this moment he opened his eyes as wide as possible.*

I do not wish to flatter myself, but I understood perfectly, after the conversation, that the lady in white had a husband who was somewhere in a distant country, that the visitor was bringing a letter from this husband, that he was being thanked for his courtesy, and congratulated on having been named Chief Secretary. All of that did not please me, and, upon leaving, I refused to embrace the lady in white, to punish her.

That day at dinner I asked my father what a secretary was. My father did not answer me at all, and my mother told me it was a small piece of furniture in which one arranged papers. How could that be?† I was put to bed, and the monsters with the eyes in the middle of their cheeks, filed past my bed, making more faces than usual.

If you think that the next day I thought of the gentleman whom I had met at the house of the lady in white, you are deceived, for I had forgotten him with my whole heart, and it depended only on him to be effaced forever from my memory. But he had the audacity to present himself again at the home of my two friends. I do not know whether it was ten days or ten years after his first visit. Today I am inclined to believe that it was ten days. It was astonishing of him, this gentleman, to take over my place thus. I examined him this time and found nothing likeable about him. He had very lustrous hair, a black mustache, black side whiskers, a clean-shaven chin with a dimple in the middle, a slender waist, fine clothes, and beyond all that,

*Literally: as wide as a porte-cochère . . .

†Literally: Does one conceive that?

an air of satisfaction. He talked about the office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to which he had been attached for two years, about fashions and about new books, about evening parties and dances at which he had looked in vain for these ladies. And they listened to him. Was that a conversation, that sort of thing? Couldn't he talk, as I did with the lady in black, about the country where the mountains are of caramel and the rivers of lemonade? When he was gone, the lady in black said that he was a charming young man. I myself said that he was old and that he was ugly. That made the lady in white laugh a great deal. It was not something to laugh at, however. But you see, she laughed at what I said, or else she did not listen to me speak. The lady in white had these two faults, not counting a third, which drove me to despair: that of crying, and crying, and crying. My mother had told me that grown-ups never cry. Ah! that's because she had never seen, as I had, the lady in white, leaning on her side in an armchair, a letter spread out on her knees, her head thrown back, and a handkerchief to her eyes. This letter (it would seem to me today that it was an anonymous letter) caused her a great deal of sorrow. It was too bad, for she knew how to laugh so well. These two visits gave me the idea of asking her to marry me. She told me that she had a big husband in Japan, and that she would have a little one on the Quai Malaquais; it was settled, and she gave me a cake.

But the gentleman with the black whiskers came back quite often. One day while the lady in white was telling me that she would have some blue fish sent for me from China, with a line to fish for them, he sent in his card and was received. By the way in which we looked at each other, it was clear that we did not like each other. The lady in white told him that her aunt (she meant the lady in black) had gone shopping at the Deux Magots [i.e., the

Two Grotesque Statuettes]. I saw the two grotesque statuettes on the mantelpiece and could not imagine why it was necessary to go out to buy them anything whatever. But things so hard to understand were presented every day. The gentleman did not seem at all distressed by the absence of the lady in black, and he told the lady in white that he wanted to speak to her seriously. She settled herself coily in her loveseat, and indicated to him that she was listening. But he looked at me and seemed embarrassed.

"He is very nice, this little boy," he said, stroking my head with his hand, "but . . ."

"He is my little husband," said the lady in white.

"Well," the gentleman began again, "couldn't you send him back to his mother? What I have to say to you should be heard only by you."

She yielded to him.

"Darling," she said to me, "go play in the dining room and don't come back until I call you. Go ahead, darling."

I went off with a heavy heart. The dining room was very interesting, however, because of a clock with a picture on its face which depicted a mountain at the edge of the sea with a church beneath a blue sky. And when the hour struck, a boat would bob up and down on the waves, a locomotive and its cars would come out of a tunnel, and a balloon would go up in the air. But when the soul is sad, nothing can make it smile. Besides, the picture-clock remained motionless. It seemed that the locomotive, the ship, and the balloon left only on the hour, and an hour is long. At least it was in those days. Luckily, the cook came to look for something in the sideboard, and seeing that I was quite sad, gave me some jam, which soothed the sorrows of my heart. But when I had no more jam, I plunged again into sorrow. Even though the picture-clock had not yet struck,

I kept imagining that hours and hours were piling up upon my sad solitude. From time to time, outbursts of the gentleman's voice would come to me from the next room. He was pleading with the lady in white; then he seemed to be angry at her. So much the better. But would they never be done? I flattened the tip of my nose against the window panes, I pulled out horsehair from the chairs, I enlarged the holes in the wallpaper, I pulled at the fringes of the curtains, and who knows what else. Boredom is a terrible thing. Finally, unable to bear it any longer, I advanced noiselessly to the door which opened upon the room with the two statuettes, and I raised my arm to reach the door-knob. I knew very well that I was doing something improper and naughty, but that in itself gave me a kind of pride.

I opened the door and I found the lady in white standing before the mantel. The gentleman, on his knees at her feet, was holding open his great arms as if to hold her. He was redder than a cock's comb; his eyes were starting from his head. How can one get into such a state?

He got up quickly when he saw me, and I do believe that for a moment he had the idea of throwing me out the window. But she, instead of scolding me, as I expected, hugged me in her arms, while calling me her darling.

Having carried me over to the couch, she wept gently for a long time against my cheek. We were alone. I told her, to console her, that the gentleman with the whiskers was a rogue, and that she would not have been sad if she had stayed alone with me, as it had been agreed. But just the same, I found that grown-ups were often very peculiar.

Hardly had we calmed down when the lady in black came in with some packages.

She asked if anyone had called.

"M. Arnould came," the lady in white replied quietly, "but he stayed only a moment."

As for that, I knew very well that it was a lie, but the good fairy of the lady in white, who had doubtless been with me for several minutes, laid her invisible finger upon my mouth.

I saw M. Arnould no more, and my love affair with the lady in white was troubled no longer. That is why, no doubt, I have not retained any memory of her. Even yesterday, that is, after more than thirty years, I did not know what had become of her.

Yesterday, I went to the ball at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I am of the opinion of Lord Palmerston, who used to say that life would be bearable without its pleasures. My daily work exceeds neither my powers nor my intelligence, and I have succeeded in becoming interested in it. It is official receptions which overpower me. I knew that it would be tiresome and useless to go to the ball at the Ministry; I knew it and I went there, because it is human nature to think wisely and to act foolishly.

Hardly had I entered the great drawing room, when the Ambassador of —— and Madame —— were announced. I had encountered the ambassador, whose handsome face bore the imprint of exertions which were not at all due to diplomatic tasks, several times. He had had, it was said, a tumultuous youth. His stay in Japan thirty years ago was particularly rich in adventures which people loved to tell about in private while drinking coffee. His wife, whom I did not have the honor of knowing, seemed to me to be past fifty. She was all in black; magnificent laces admirably enveloped her faded beauty, the shadow of which could still be glimpsed. I was happy to be presented to her, for I greatly esteem the conversation of old women. We chatted about a thousand things, to the sound of the violins which made the young women dance, and she happened by chance to speak to me of the time when she used

to live in an old house on the Quai Malaquais.

"You were the lady in white!" I exclaimed.

"Why, indeed, sir," she said to me, "I always used to dress in white."

"And I, madame, was your little husband."

"What! sir, you are the son of that excellent Doctor Nozière? You used to like cakes so much. Do come and eat some with us. We have a little informal tea every Saturday. What a small world!"

"And the lady in black?"

"It is I who am the lady in black today. My poor aunt died in the year of the war. In the last days of her life she often used to speak of you."

While we were talking thus, a gentleman with a white mustache and whiskers respectfully greeted the ambassador's wife with all the stiff grace of an old gallant. I seemed to recognize his chin.

"M. Arnould," she said to me, "an old friend."

3. I Give You This Rose

We lived in a large apartment full of strange things. On the walls there were trophies of savage weapons, surmounted by skulls and scalps; canoes with their paddles were suspended from the ceilings, side by side with stuffed alligators. Glass cases held birds, nests, branches of coral, and an infinity of little skeletons which seemed full of bitterness and malevolence. I did not know what pact my father had made with these monstrous creatures; I know it now: it was the pact of the collector. He, so wise and so impartial, dreamed of cramming all of nature into a closet. It was in the interest of science; so he said, so he believed. As a matter of fact, it was because of collector's mania.

The whole apartment was filled with natural curiosities. Only the little sitting room had not been invaded by zoology nor mineralogy nor ethnography nor teratology. There, neither scales of serpents nor shells of turtles, no bones, no arrowheads, no tomahawk blades, only roses. The wallpaper of the little sitting room was strewn with them. They were roses in bud, small, modest, all alike, and all pretty.

My mother, who had serious grievances against comparative zoology and the measurement of skulls, spent her day in the little sitting room before her worktable. I would play at her feet on the rug with a sheep who had only three legs, after having had four of them, because of which he was unworthy to appear with the two-headed rabbits in my father's teratological collection. I also had a Punchinello who moved his arms and smelled of paint. I must have had a great deal of imagination in those days, for that Punchinello and that sheep represented for me the various persons of thousands of strange plays. When something especially interesting happened to the sheep or to the Punchinello, I would inform my mother. But it is remarkable that grown-ups never understand well what little children explain. My mother was inattentive. She did not listen to me with enough attention. That was her great fault. But she had a way of looking at me with her big eyes and of calling me "little silly," which set everything right.

One day, in the little sitting room, setting aside her embroidery, she lifted me up in her arms. Then, showing me one of the flowers on the wallpaper, she said to me, "I give you this rose."

And, to distinguish it, she marked it with a cross with her embroidery needle.

Never did a gift make me happier.

4. *Edward's Children*

“He looks like a highway robber, my little boy does, with his hair disordered. Cut it in the style of ‘Edward’s children,’ M. Valence.”

M. Valence, to whom my mother was speaking in this way, was a clever old barber with a limp, the very sight of whom reminded me of the sickening odor of hot irons, and whom I feared, as much because of his hands greasy with pomade as because he could not cut my hair without letting some of it fall down my neck. And so, when he put a white barber’s cloth about me and tied a towel about my neck, I would resist, and he would say to me, “But, my little friend, you do not want to keep a head of hair like a savage’s, as if you were just leaving the raft of the Medusa.”

On every occasion he would tell, in his vibrant voice with a Southern accent, the story of the shipwreck of the Medusa, from which he had escaped only after frightful sufferings. The raft, the useless distress signals, the meal of human flesh, he told all that with the good humor of one who is looking at things from their good side, for he was a jolly man, was M. Valence.

That day he trimmed my hair too slowly for my liking, and in a style which I thought very strange as soon as I could look at myself in the mirror. Then I saw myself with my hair combed down, and cut straight as a cap above my eyebrows, and hanging on my cheeks like a spaniel’s ears.

My mother was delighted. Valence had really cut my hair in the style of Edward’s children. Dressed as I was in a black velvet blouse, one had only, she said, to shut me up in the tower with my older brother . . .

"If anyone would dare!" she added, lifting me in her arms with a charming pride.

She carried me away, hugging me tight, to the carriage. For we were going to pay a visit.

I asked her who was this older brother whom I did not know and this tower which frightened me.

And my mother, who had the divine patience and the joyful simplicity of those souls whose only business in this world is to love, told me in poetic baby-talk how the two children of King Edward, who were handsome and good, were snatched away from their mother and were smothered in a cell in the Tower of London by their wicked uncle Richard.

She added, apparently inspired by a fashionable picture, that the children's little dog barked to warn them of the approach of the murderers.

She finished by saying that the story was very old but so touching and so beautiful that people never stopped making paintings of it and representing it in the theaters, and that all the spectators used to cry, and that she had cried with them.

I said to Mama that someone would have to be very wicked to make her and everyone else cry like that.

She replied that, on the contrary, a great soul and a fine talent were necessary, but I did not understand her. I understood nothing then about the pleasure of tears.

The carriage let us out in the Isle Saint-Louis in front of an old house which I did not know. We went up a stone staircase, the worn and cracked steps of which had an unfriendly look to me.

At the first landing, a little dog began to yelp. "It is he," I thought, "it's Edward's children's dog." And a sudden, unconquerable, crazy fear took possession of me. Clearly, this staircase was that of the Tower, and with

my hair cut like a cap and my velvet blouse, I was Edward's child. They were going to kill me. I did not want them to. I hung on to my mother's dress, crying, "Take me away! Take me away! I don't want to go up the staircase of the Tower."

"Be quiet, do, you little silly. . . . Come on, come on, my darling, don't be afraid. . . . This child is obviously too nervous. . . . Pierre, Pierre, my little fellow, be reasonable."

But, hanging on to her skirt, stiff, tense, I heard nothing; I wept, I howled, I suffocated. My glances, full of horror, swam in the shadows animated by a fertile fear.

At my cries, a door opened on the landing, and out of it came an old gentleman, in whom, despite my terror and despite his skullcap and his dressing gown, I recognized my friend Robin, Robin my friend, who once a week brought me cookies in the lining of his hat. It was Robin himself, but I could not understand that he should be in the Tower, not knowing that the Tower was a house, and that, the house being old, it was natural that this old gentleman should live there.

He held out his arms to us with his tobacco pouch in his left hand, and a pinch of tobacco between the thumb and index finger of the right. It was he.

"Do come in, dear lady. My wife is better; she will be delighted to see you. But master Pierre, so it seems to me, is not very confident. Has our little dog frightened him? Here, Finette."

I was reassured. I said, "You live in an ugly old tower, Monsieur Robin."

At these words, my mother pinched my arm hard with the intention, which I understood very well, of keeping me from asking my good friend Robin for a cake, which was exactly what I was going to do.

In the yellow drawing room of M. and Mme Robin, Finette was a great relief to me. I played with her, and the idea remained in my mind that she had barked at the murderers of Edward's children. That is why I shared with her the cake that M. Robin gave me. But one cannot busy oneself for long with the same object, especially when one is a little child. My thoughts jumped from one thing to another, as birds from branch to branch, then lit again on Edward's children. Having formed an opinion in regard to them, I was anxious to display it. I pulled at M. Robin's sleeve.

"You know, M. Robin, if Mama had been in the Tower of London, she would have kept the wicked uncle from suffocating Edward's children beneath their pillows."

It seemed to me that M. Robin did not appreciate the full force of my idea, but when we were alone again, on the staircase, Mama and I, she lifted me up in her arms, "Monster! Let me hug you!"

5. The Bunch of Grapes

I was happy. I was very happy. I imagined my father, my mother, my nursemaid as extremely gentle giants, witnesses of the first days of the world, unchangeable, eternal, unique of their kind. I was certain that they would know how to protect me against all evil, and I felt complete security with them. The confidence which my mother inspired in me was something infinite. When I recall that divine, that adorable confidence, I am tempted to blow kisses to the little fellow that I was, and those who understand how difficult it is in this world to keep an emotion in its fullness will understand such an elation in regard to such memories.

I was happy. A thousand things, both familiar and mys-

terious, occupied my imagination, a thousand things which were nothing in themselves, but which made a part of my life. My life was tiny, but it was a life; that is, the center of things, the middle of the world. Do not smile at what I have said, or smile only in a friendly spirit, and think of this: whoever lives, be he a little dog, is in the center of things.

I was happy to see and to hear. My mother barely opened her mirrored wardrobe without making me feel a delicate curiosity, full of poetry. What was there then in that closet? Goodness! what could be there: linens, fragrant sachets, hat boxes, boxes. I suspect today that my poor mother had a weakness for boxes. She had all kinds of them, and in prodigious quantity. And these boxes, which I was forbidden to touch, inspired me with profound meditations. My toys also set my little head working; at least the toys which were promised me and for which I waited; for those which I possessed no longer had any mystery for me, and, therefore, no more charm. But how beautiful they were, the toys of my dreams. Another miracle was the number of features and faces that could be drawn with one pencil or one pen. I would draw soldiers; I would make an oval face and put a shako above. It was only after numerous observations that I made the head go into the shako up to the eyebrows. I was responsive to flowers, to perfumes, to luxurious table appointments, to fine clothes. My cap with plumes and my striped stockings gave me a certain pride. But what I loved more than any one thing in particular were things in general: the house, light, air, who knows what? Life, in a word. A great sweetness enveloped me. Never did a little bird rub himself more pleasantly against the down of his nest.

I was happy. I was very happy. However, I envied another child. He was named Alphonse. I did not know him

by any other name, and it is highly probably that he had no other but that. His mother was a laundress and worked in the city. Alphonse wandered all day long in the courtyard or on the Quai, and from my window I observed his dirty face, his shock of yellow hair, his breeches without a seat, and his worn-out shoes which he trailed through the gutters. I, too, would have liked very much to have walked at liberty through the gutters. Alphonse haunted the cooks and won from them many a slap and some old pie crusts. Sometimes the grooms would send him to draw a bucket of water from the pump, which he would bring back proudly, with a red face and his tongue hanging out of his mouth. And I would envy him. He did not have to learn any of La Fontaine's fables, as I did; he was not afraid of being scolded because of a spot on his shirt, not he! He was not obliged to say "Good day, sir, good day, madame," to people whose days and whose evenings, good or bad, did not interest him at all. And if he did not have, as I did, a Noah's ark and a mechanical horse, he played as he liked with the sparrows that he caught, the dogs who wandered as he did, and even with the horses in the stable, until the coachman would send him out at the end of a broom. He was free and bold. From the courtyard, his domain, he watched me at my window as one watches a bird in a cage.

This courtyard was gay because of the animals of all sorts and the servants who frequented it. It was large; the house which enclosed it was covered with an old vine, gnarled but slender, above which was a sundial, the numbers of which had been worn away by the rain and the sun, and that shadowy hand which glided imperceptibly over the stone used to astonish me. Of all the phantoms which I evoke, that of the old courtyard is one of the strangest to the Parisians of today. Their court-

yards contain four square meters; a little scrap of the sky can be seen there, as big as a handkerchief, above five stories of over-hanging pantries. That is progress, but it is unhealthy.

It happened one day that this courtyard which was so gay, where the housekeepers used to come in the morning to fill their pitchers at the pump, and where the cooks, at about six o'clock, used to toss their salads in salad baskets, while exchanging remarks with the grooms, it happened that this courtyard had the pavement taken up. It was unpaved only to be repaved; but as it had rained during the course of the work, it was very muddy, and Alphonse, who used to live there like a satyr in his woods, was the color of the earth from head to foot. He moved the cobblestones from place to place with joyous enthusiasm. Then, raising his head, and seeing me shut in high above, he made me a sign to come. I really wanted to play with him at moving cobblestones. As for me, I had no cobblestones to move in my room. It happened that the door of the apartment was open. I went down into the courtyard.

"Here I am," I said to Alphonse.

"Carry this cobblestone," he said to me.

He had a savage look and a harsh voice, I obeyed. Suddenly, the cobblestone was snatched from my hands and I found myself lifted up from the ground. It was my nursemaid, highly indignant, who was carrying me off. She washed me with laundry soap and shamed me for playing with a ragamuffin, a tramp, a good-for-nothing.

"Alphonse," added my mother, "Alphonse is badly brought up. It is not his fault, it is his misfortune; but well-brought-up children ought not to associate with those who are not."

I was a very intelligent and very thoughtful child. I re-

membered my mother's words, and they became associated, I do not know how, with what I learned about the accursed children while having my old illustrated Bible explained to me. My feelings toward Alphonse changed at once. I envied him no longer, no indeed. "It is not his fault, it is his misfortune." You did well, Mama, to speak to me this way. You did well to reveal to me from my tenderest years the innocence of the unfortunate. Your saying was a good one; it was up to me to keep it before me for the rest of my life.

On this occasion, at least, it had its effect, and I was touched by the fate of the accursed child. One day while he was teasing an old tenant's parrot in the courtyard, I contemplated this somber and powerful Cain with all the compunction of a good little Abel. It is happiness, alas, which makes Abels. I exerted my imagination to give the other a sign of my pity. I thought of blowing him a kiss, but his wild face seemed to me hardly fitted to receive it, and my heart refused this gift. I searched a long time for what I could well give him; my difficulty was great. To give Alphonse my mechanical horse, which, it happened, had no longer tail nor mane, seemed to me completely excessive. And then, was it really by the gift of a horse that one showed one's pity? It had to be a present suitable for an accursed one. A flower perhaps? There were some bouquets in the drawing room. But a flower, that resembles a kiss. I doubted that Alphonse liked flowers. In great perplexity, I walked around the dining room. Suddenly I joyfully clapped my hands. I had found it!

In a bowl on the sideboard there were some magnificent Fontainebleau grapes. I got up on a chair and took a long, heavy bunch of these grapes, which three-quarters filled the bowl. The pale green grapes were golden on

one side, and they looked as if they would melt deliciously in the mouth. But I did not taste them. I ran to look for a spool of thread in my mother's worktable. I was forbidden to take anything from it, but one has to know how to disobey. I fastened the bunch of grapes to the end of the thread, and, leaning on the window-guard, I called Alphonse and gently let the bunch of grapes down into the courtyard. To see it better, the accursed child brushed back the locks of his yellow hair from his eyes, and, when it was within arm's reach, he snatched it away with the thread. Then, lifting his head, he stuck out his tongue at me, thumbed his nose, and ran off with the grapes. My little friends had not accustomed me to such manners. I was at first very much annoyed by it. But a thought calmed me down. "I did well," I thought, "not to send him either a flower or a kiss."

My anger faded away at this thought, so true is it that when pride is satisfied, the rest matters little.

Still, at the idea that I would have to confess my adventure to my mother, I fell into a profound despair. I was wrong; my mother scolded me, but with gaiety; I saw it in her eyes, which were laughing.

"You must give of your own things, not those of others," she said, "and you must know how to give."

"That is the secret of happiness, and few know it," added my father.

He knew it, indeed.

6. Marcelle with the Golden Eyes

I was five years old and I had a conception of the world which I have had to change since; it is too bad, it was charming. One day while I was busy drawing some men, my mother called me without thinking that she was disturbing me. Mothers have these thoughtless habits.

This time, it had to do with washing up. I did not feel the necessity of it, and I saw the annoyance of it. I resisted, I made faces, I was unbearable.

My mother said to me, "Your godmother is coming to see you. It would be a fine thing if you were not properly dressed!"

My godmother! I had not yet seen her; I did not know her at all. I did not even know that she existed. But I knew quite well what a godmother was. I had read about her in stories and seen her in pictures. I knew that a godmother was a fairy.

I allowed myself to be combed and washed as much as my dear mother pleased. I thought about my godmother with an intense curiosity to know her. But, although I was usually a great one for questions, I asked nothing at all about what I was burning to know.

Why?

You ask me why? Oh, it was because I did not dare, because fairies, as I understood them, liked silence and mystery, because there is in the emotions an indefiniteness so precious that the youngest soul in this world is instinctively jealous of preserving it; because there exist, for the child as for the man, inexpressible things; because, without having known her, I loved my godmother.

I am really going to surprise you, but happily the truth often has something unforeseen about it, which makes it bearable. . . . My godmother was as beautiful as could be wished. When I saw her, I recognized her. It was indeed she whom I awaited, she was my fairy. Overcome with pleasure, I contemplated her without surprise. On this occasion, and by a miracle, nature equaled a child's dreams of beauty.

My godmother looked at me; she had golden eyes. She smiled at me, and I saw that she had teeth as small as

mine. She spoke; her voice was clear and sang like a spring in the woods. . . . She kissed me, her lips were fresh. I feel them still upon my cheek.

I felt an infinite sweetness in seeing her, and it would seem that this encounter must have been charming in every respect; for the memory of it which remains with me is free of any detail which might have spoiled it. It has taken on a luminous simplicity. It is with her mouth half-open for a smile and for a kiss, standing, with open arms, that my godmother invariably appears to me.

She lifted me from the ground and said to me, "My treasure, let me see the color of your eyes." Then, ruffling my curls, "He is blond, but he will become dark."

My fairy knew the future. However, her predictions did not forecast it in its entirety. My hair today is no longer either blond or black.

She sent me next day some toys which did not seem to me to be made for me. I lived with my books, my pictures, my paste pot, my coloring boxes, and all my equipment of a frail, intelligent little boy, already sedentary, who was naively initiating himself by means of his toys into a feeling for forms and colors, the cause of so many joys and sorrows.

The presents selected by my godmother were not in line with these habits. It was a complete outfit for a sportsman and little gymnast: trapeze, ropes, bars, weights, dumbbells, everything necessary for exercising a child's strength and preparing for manly grace.

Unfortunately, I was already round shouldered,* had a taste for cutouts done patiently in the evenings by lamp-light, a profound feeling for pictures, and when I set aside my amusements of a predestined artist, it was because of

*Literally: . . . already had the bend of the desk . . .

fits of madness, because of a rage for disorder, to play wildly at games without rules, without rhythm, at robbers, at shipwreck, at fire. All this apparatus of polished boxwood and iron seemed to me cold and heavy, without imagination or soul, unless my godmother, when teaching me the use of them, would give them a bit of her charm. She lifted the dumbbells with a great deal of swagger, and, holding her elbows back, she showed me how the bars, passed over the back and under the arms, would develop the chest.

One day she took me on her knees and promised me a boat, a boat with all its rigging, all its sails, and cannons at the portholes. My godmother talked about nautical things like an old sea dog. She did not forget the topmast, the poop, the shrouds, the top-gallant sail, or the royal sail. She would never have done with these strange words, and she spoke them with something like affection. Probably they reminded her of many things. A fairy, she goes upon the waters.

I did not receive that boat. But, even at a tender age, I never needed to possess things to enjoy them, and the fairy's boat kept me busy for many hours. I used to see it. I see it still. It is no longer a toy. It is a phantom. It glides silently over a misty sea, and I see on its deck a motionless woman, her arms inert, her eyes huge and vacant.

I was to see my godmother no more.

I already had a just idea of her character. I felt that she had been born to please and to love, that that was her business in this world. I was not deceived, alas! I learned later that Marcelle (she was named Marcelle) had never done anything but that.

It was many years later that I learned something about

her life. Marcelle and my mother had become acquainted at the convent. But my mother, who was a few years older, was too wise and too reserved to become the bosom friend of Marcelle, who put an extraordinary enthusiasm and sort of madness into her friendships. The young boarder who inspired the most extravagant feelings in Marcelle was the daughter of a merchant, a big, placid girl, who was scornful and stupid. Marcelle did not take her eyes off her, would burst into tears over a word, a gesture from her friend, would harrass her with vows, would make jealous scenes all the time, and would write her twenty-page letters in study hall, so that the big girl, who had become impatient, said that there had been enough of this and that she wanted to be left in peace.

Poor Marcelle withdrew, so discouraged and so sad that she filled my mother with pity. It was then that their friendship began, a little while before my mother left the convent. They promised to visit each other and kept their word.

Marcelle had the best man in the world for a father, charming, with plenty of wit and no common sense. He left the sea, for no reason, after twenty years of sailing. People were astonished. They should have been astonished that he stayed so long in the service. His fortune was moderate, and his business sense was detestable.

Looking out his window one rainy day, he saw his wife and daughter on foot, greatly hindered by their skirts and their umbrellas. He realized for the first time that they had no carriage, and this discovery grieved him greatly. At once, he sold his stocks, sold his wife's jewels, borrowed money from various friends, and rushed to Baden-Baden. Since he had an infallible system, he gambled for high stakes in order to win horses,

coach, and footmen. At the end of a week, he went back home without a cent, believing more than ever in his system. He had left a little property in Brie, where he raised pineapples. After a year of this farming, he had to sell the land to pay for the greenhouses. Then he threw himself into the invention of machinery, and his wife died without his noticing it. He sent plans and reports to the ministries, to the Chambers, to the Institute, to learned societies, to everyone. These reports were sometimes written up in verse. However, he earned some money, he lived. It was miraculous. Marcelle found it all simple, and would buy hats with all the five-franc pieces that fell into her hands.

Although she was only a young girl at the time, my mother did not understand living in this way, and Marcelle made her tremble.

"If you knew," my mother told me a hundred times, "if you only knew how charming she was then!"

"Oh, Mama dear, I imagine it very well."

There was a falling out between them, however, and the cause was a delicate emotion which ought not to be left in the shadow where the faults of those who are dear to us are hidden, but which I ought not to analyse as any other could. I ought not, I say, and no more could I, having only very vague information on this subject. My mother was then engaged to a young doctor who married her a little while later and became my father. Marcelle was charming; you have been told that often enough. She inspired and respired love. My father was young. They saw each other, talked together. What more do I know? . . . My mother got married and saw Marcelle no more.

But after two years of exile the beautiful girl with the golden eyes won her pardon. She was so thoroughly

pardoned that she was begged to be my godmother. In the interval she had married. That, I think, had been a great help in the reconciliation. Marcelle adored her husband, a little blackamoor monster, who had been at sea on a merchant ship since the age of seven, and whom I strongly suspect of having engaged in the slave trade. As he owned properties in Rio de Janeiro, he took my godmother there.

My mother often told me, "You cannot imagine what Marcelle's husband was like: ugly, a monkey, a monkey dressed in yellow from head to foot. He spoke no language. He knew only a little of them all, and expressed himself by cries, gestures, and rolling his eyes. To be fair, he had superb eyes. And do not think, my child, that he was from the Islands," added my mother, "he was a Frenchman, a native of Brest, and was named Dupont."

You must be taught, in passing, that my mother said "the Islands" for everything that was not Europe; and that threw my father, the author of various works on comparative ethnography, into a state of despair.

"Marcelle," continued my mother, "Marcelle was crazy about her husband. At first, one always seemed to be disturbing them by going to see them. She was happy for three or four years; I say happy because you must allow for different tastes. But during the trip that she made to France . . . you do not remember, you were too little."

"Oh! Mama, I remember perfectly."

"Well, then, during this trip, her blackamoor got into horrible habits, down there in the Islands: he would get drunk in sailors' taverns. He received a knife wound. At the first notice she received of it, Marcelle sailed. She nursed her husband with that superb enthusiasm that she put into everything. But he had a hemorrhage and died."

That is the story which my mother told me. I know no more about it. But, every time the sky is a tender gray, and the wind moans gently, my thoughts fly to Marcelle, and I say to her, "Poor troubled soul, poor soul wandering on the ancient ocean which cradled the first loves of the world, dear phantom, O my godmother and my fairy, be blessed by the most faithful of those who loved you, by the only one, perhaps, who still remembers you! Blessed be thou for the gift which you laid upon my cradle, simply by leaning over it; blessed be thou for having revealed to me, when I had hardly begun to think,* the delicious torments which beauty gives to the souls that are eager to understand it; blessed be thou by him who was the child whom you lifted from the ground to seek the color of his eyes! He was, that child, the happiest, and, I dare say, the best of your friends. It was to him that you gave the most, O generous woman, for you opened for him, with your two arms, the infinite world of dreams."

7. Note Written at Dawn

Here is the harvest of a winter's night, my first sheaf of memories. Shall I let it blow to the wind? Would it not be better to bind it up and take it to the barn? It will be, I think, solid nourishment for minds.

The best and the wisest of men, M. Littré, would have liked each family to have its archives and its moral history. "Since," he said, "a sound philosophy taught me greatly to esteem tradition and conservation, I have often regretted that, during the Middle Ages, middle-class families did not think of keeping simple journals in which would be noted the principal events of domestic

*Literally: I had hardly been born to thought . . .

life, and which would be handed down as long as the family lasted. How curious would be those journals which would have reached our era, however brief the notes may have been! How many ideas and lost experiences, which would have been saved by a little care and a sense of continuity!”

Well, I shall realize on my part the wise old man's wish: this will be kept and will begin the journal of the Nozière family. Let us not lose anything of the past. It is only with the past that the future is built.

PART TWO

New Loves

1. The Hermitage at the Zoological Gardens

I did not know how to read, I wore little boy's pants, I cried when my nursemaid wiped my nose, and I was devoured by the love of glory. Such is truth: at the tenderest age, I cherished the desire to make myself famous without delay and to live on in the memory of mankind. I sought for the means to it even while setting out my lead soldiers on the dining room table. If I could have, I would have gone to conquer immortality on the battlefield, and I would have become like one of those generals I waved about in my little hands to whom I dispensed the fortunes of war upon a piece of oilcloth.

But it was not in me to have a horse, a uniform, a regiment, and enemies, all things essential to military glory. That is why I thought of becoming a saint. That requires much less equipment and brings in a great deal of praise. My mother was pious. Her piety — which, like her, was loving and serious — moved me greatly. My mother often used to read to me the Lives of the Saints, to which I would listen with delight and which filled my soul with astonishment and love. So I knew how men of God went about making their lives precious and full of merits. I knew what heavenly fragrance emanates from the roses of martyrdom. But martyrdom is an extreme which I did not contemplate. I thought no more of apostleship nor of preaching, which were hardly within my means. I limited

myself to austerities, as being an easy and certain practice.

To devote myself to them without losing time, I refused to eat. My mother, who knew nothing about my new vocation, thought I was ill, and looked at me with an uneasiness which made me sad. I did not stop fasting just the same. Then, recalling Saint Simon Stylites, I got up on the kitchen water tank; but I could not live there, because Julie, our maid, promptly took me down. Having descended from my water tank, I enthusiastically threw myself on the path to perfection and resolved to imitate Saint Nicholas of Patras, who gave his wealth to the poor. The window of my father's study opened on the Quai. Out that window I threw a dozen pennies which had been given me because they were new and shone; next, I threw out marbles and tops, and my whipping top with its eelskin whip.

"That child is stupid!" cried my father, closing the window. I felt anger and shame at hearing myself so judged. But I thought that my father, not being a saint as I was, would not share with me the glory of the blessed, and that thought was a great consolation to me.

When the time came to go for a walk, my hat was put on. I tore off its feather, after the example of the blessed Labre, who, when someone gave him a filthy old hat, carefully dragged it through the mud before putting it on his head. My mother, upon learning of the adventure of the wealth and of the feather, shrugged her shoulders and gave a heavy sigh. I really troubled her.

During the walk, I kept my eyes lowered in order not to be distracted by external objects, thus conforming to a precept often given in the Lives of the Saints.

It was after the return from this wholesome walk that, to complete my saintliness, I made myself a hair shirt

by stuffing down my back the horsehair from an old armchair. I experienced some new tribulations, for Julie surprised me at the moment when I was thus imitating the sons of Saint Francis. Halting at the appearance without penetrating into the spirit, she thought that I had broken up an armchair and spanked me out of stupidity.

Thinking back over the painful incidents of that day, I realize that it is very difficult to practice saintliness in the midst of one's family. I understood why Saints Anthony and Jerome had gone away to the desert among the lions and the satyrs; and I resolved to retire to a hermitage the next day. I chose for my hiding-place the labyrinth of the Zoological Gardens; it was there that I wished to live in contemplation, dressed, like Saint Paul the Hermit, in a robe of palm leaves. I thought, "There will be some roots in that garden for my nourishment. A hut will be found at the top of a mountain. There I shall be in the midst of all the beasts of creation. The lion who dug with his claws the grave of Saint Mary the Egyptian will probably come to look for me to perform the burial rites for some hermit of the neighborhood. Like Saint Anthony, I shall see the man with cloven hoofs and the horse with a man's torso. And perhaps the angels will raise me up from the earth as they sing canticles."

My resolution will seem less strange when it is known that for a long time the Zoological Gardens had been a holy place for me, rather like the terrestrial paradise which I used to see depicted in my old illustrated Bible. My nursemaid often took me there, and I experienced a feeling of holy joy there. The sky itself seemed to me more spiritual and purer than elsewhere, and in the clouds which passed over the parrots' house, over the tiger's cage, and the bear's pit, and over the elephant's house, I

saw confusedly God the Father with his white beard and in his blue robe, his arm extended to bless me along with the antelope and the gazelle, the rabbit and the dove; and when I was seated beneath the cedar of Lebanon, I saw descending on my head through the branches the rays of light which the Eternal Father allowed to escape from his fingertips. The animals which ate from my hand as they looked at me with sweetness reminded me of what my mother taught me about Adam and the days of first innocence. The Creation reunited there, as it once was on the Patriarch's floating house, was reflected in my eyes, all adorned with childlike charm. And nothing spoiled my paradise for me. I was not shocked to see nursemaids, soldiers, and soft-drink vendors there. On the contrary, I felt happy next to these humble ones and these little ones, myself the littlest of all. Everything seemed to me simple, lovable, and good, because, with supreme candor, I brought everything into accord with my childish ideal.

I went to sleep with the resolution to go to live in this garden to acquire merits and become the equal of the great saints whose colorful history I remembered.

The next morning my resolution was still strong. I told my mother about it. She began to laugh.

"Who gave you the idea of turning yourself into a hermit in the labyrinth at the Zoo?" she said, as she combed my hair and continued to laugh.

"I want to be famous," I answered, "and put on my visiting cards 'Hermit and Calendar Saint' as Papa puts on his 'Laureate of the Academy of Medicine and Secretary of the Society of Anthropology'."

At this remark, my mother dropped the comb which she was passing through my hair.

"Pierre!" she exclaimed, "Pierre! what madness and

what a sin! I am very unhappy. My little boy has lost his reason at the age when one does not yet have any."

Then turning to my father, "You heard him, my dear. At the age of seven, he wants to be famous."

"Dearest," answered my father, "you will see that at twenty years he will be disgusted with glory."

"God willing!" said my mother. "I do not like vain people at all."

God willed it, and my father was not wrong.

Like the King of Yvetot, I get along very well without glory and have not the least desire to engrave the name of Pierre Nozière upon the memory of mankind.

However, when I take a walk nowadays in this Zoo, with my procession of faraway memories, an incomprehensible desire comes over me to tell unknown friends about the dream which I had formerly of going to live there as an anchorite. As if this child's dream, in blending itself with someone's else thoughts, could bring the sweetness of a smile.

There is also for me the question of knowing if I really did well in renouncing military life from the age of six, for the fact is that I have not thought since of being a soldier. I regret it a bit. There is a great dignity in the life of arms.* Duty is clear in it, and as much better determined as the reasoning which determines it is not. The man who can reason out his actions soon discovers that there are few innocents. One must be a priest or a soldier in order not to know the pangs of doubt.

As for the dream of being a hermit, I have had it again whenever I seemed to feel that life was basically evil; that is, I had it every day. But every day nature tugs at my ear and takes me back to the distractions in which humble lives are passed.

*Literally: There is, under arms, a great dignity of life.

2. *Grandma Nozière*

That morning, my father was upset.* My mother, who was very busy, spoke in a low voice. In the dining room, a dressmaker was sewing black clothes.

Dinner was sad and full of whisperings. I sensed clearly that something was going on.

Finally my mother, all dressed in black and veiled, said, "Come, darling."

I asked her where we were going; she answered, "Pierre, listen to me now. Your Grandma Nozière . . . you know, your father's mother . . . died last night. We are going to say good-bye to her and to kiss her one last time."

And I saw that my mother had been crying. As for me, I had a very strong impression, for it has still not faded after so many years, and so vague that it is impossible for me to express myself in words. I cannot even say what that sad impression was. The sadness, at least, had nothing cruel about it. One word, perhaps, just one, that of "romantic," could be applied in some respect to that impression which, indeed, had not been formed by any element of reality.

All along the way I thought of my grandmother, but I could not form any idea of what had happened to her. To die! I could not imagine what that could be. I felt only that the hour of death† was serious.

By an explicable illusion, I thought, as we approached the house of death, that the surroundings and the whole neighborhood were under the influence of my grandmother's death, that the morning silence of the streets, the calls of neighboring men and women, the rapid gait of passers-by, the

*Literally: . . . had an upset face.

†Literally: . . . the hour of it . . .

sound of the blacksmith's hammers, all were caused by my grandmother's death. With this idea, which absorbed me entirely, I associated the beauty of the trees, the freshness of the air, and the splendor of the sky, observed for the first time.

I felt that I was walking on a path of mystery, and when, at the turn of a street, I saw the little garden and the well-known little house, I felt almost a sense of disappointment at finding nothing extraordinary about it. The birds were singing.

I was afraid and looked at my mother. Her eyes were fixed with an indescribable expression of horror upon a point to which I directed my gaze.

It was then that I noticed through the windows and white curtains of my grandmother's room, pale light, which trembled. And that glimmer of light was so funereal in the great clarity of the day that I lowered my head to see it no more.

We went up the little wooden staircase and crossed through the apartment, which was filled with a vast silence. When my mother put out her hand to open the door of the bedroom, I wished to hold back her arm. . . . We entered. A nun who was seated in an armchair got up and made room for us at the head of the bed. My grandmother was there, lying down, her eyes closed.

It seemed to me that her head had grown heavy, heavy as a stone, so much did it sink into the pillow. With what clarity I saw her. A white cap hid her hair; she seemed less old than usual, altogether lacking color.

Oh, how she did not seem to be sleeping! But whence came that little mocking and obstinate smile that caused so much pain to see?

It seemed to me that her eyelids quivered a little, doubt-

less because they were exposed to the trembling light of the two candles burning on the table, next to a dish in which a twig of boxwood was dipped in holy water.

"Kiss your grandmother," Mama told me.

I advanced my lips. The kind of chill I felt has no name and never will have any.

I lowered my eyes and heard my mother sobbing.

I do not know, truly, what would have become of me if my grandmother's servant had not taken me away from that room.

She took me by the hand, led me to a toy store, and said to me: "Choose."

I chose a cross-bow and had a good time throwing chick-peas in among the leaves of the trees.

I had forgotten my grandmother.

It was only in the evening, when I saw my father, that the thoughts of the morning came back to me. My poor father was no longer recognizable. His face was swollen, shiny, full of red splotches, his eyes watering, his lips twitching.

He did not hear what was said to him, and went from despair to impatience. Near him, my mother was writing out addresses on black-bordered letters. Relatives came to help. I was shown how to fold the letters. We were about ten around a big table. It was hot. I was working at a new task; that gave me some importance and amused me.

After her death, my grandmother lived for me in a second life more remarkable than the first. I imagined with an incredible power all that I had seen done or heard said formerly, and my father told stories about her every day, which made her alive for us, so vividly that sometimes, in the evening, at table, after dinner, it seemed to us almost that we had seen her breaking bread with us. Why did we not say to that dear shade what the pilgrims of Emmaus said to the Master, "Abide with us, for it is growing late, and already

day is going down."

Oh, what a nice ghost she made, with her lace cap with the green ribbons! It never entered one's mind that she was happy in the other world. Death was less suited to her than to anyone. It is proper for a monk to die, or for some beautiful heroine. But it is not at all right for a little old woman, laughing and frivolous, pleasingly wrinkled, like Grandma Nozière.

I am going to tell you what I discovered all by myself when she was still alive.

Grandma was frivolous; Grandma had easy morals; Grandma had no more piety than a bird. You had to see the round little eye she rolled at us when, on Sundays, we left, my mother and I, for church. She smiled at the seriousness which my mother brought to all affairs in this world and the next. She easily pardoned me for my faults, and I think she was a woman to pardon greater ones than mine. She had the habit of saying about me, "He will be a different sort of fellow from his father." She meant by that that I would spend my youth in dancing and that I would be in love with a hundred thousand girls. She flattered me. The only thing of which she would approve in me if she were still in this world (where she would be a hundred and ten years old today) is a great ease in living and a happy tolerance for which I have not paid too much by buying them at the cost of some moral and political beliefs. These qualities had for my grandmother the charm of natural graces. She died without knowing that she possessed them. My inferiority is to know that I am tolerant and sociable.

She dated from the eighteenth century, my grandmother. And it was quite apparent. I regret that her memoirs were not written. As for writing them herself, she was quite incapable of it. But ought not my father to have done it instead

of measuring skulls of Papuans and Bushmen? Caroline Nozière was born at Versailles on April 16, 1772; she was the daughter of Dr. Dussuel, whose intelligence and character were esteemed by Cabanis. It was Dussuel who in 1776 took care of the Dauphin, who had a slight case of scarlatina. One of the Queen's carriages would come every day to Luciennes to pick him up at the little house where he lived shabbily with his books and his plant collection, like a disciple of Jean-Jacques. One day the carriage returned empty to the palace; the doctor had refused to come. At the next visit, the Queen, who was annoyed, said to him, "So you have forgotten us, sir!"

"Madame," answered Dussuel, "your reproaches offend me; but they do honor to nature, and I ought to forgive them in a mother. Do not doubt it, I care for your son with humanity. But I was detained yesterday at the bedside of a sick peasant woman."

In 1789 Dussuel published a pamphlet which I cannot open without respect nor read without smiling. It has for a title: A Citizen's Prayers, and for a motto: Miseris succurrere disco. The author says at the beginning that he is saying, in a cottage, prayers for the happiness of the French people. He then sets forth with simplicity the rules for public felicity; they are those of a judicious liberty guaranteed by the Constitution. He concludes by pointing out Louis XVI, king of a free people, for recognition by men of feeling, and announces the return of the Golden Age.

Three years later, his patients, who were at the same time his friends, were guillotined, and he himself, suspected of being too moderate, was taken, at the order of the Sevres committee, to Versailles, into the convent of Recollets, which had been transformed into a prison. He arrived there, covered with dust, and more like an old tramp than a phi-

losopher-doctor. He put down a little case containing the works of Locke and Helvetius, let himself fall into a chair, and sighed: "So this is the reward for fifty years of virtue?"

A wonderfully beautiful young woman, whom he had not at first seen, said to him, as she drew near with a basin and sponge, "It is possible that we shall be guillotined, sir. While waiting, would you allow me to wash your face and hands, for you look like a savage."

"Great-hearted woman," exclaimed old Dussuel, "was it in the dwelling of crime that I was meant to encounter you? Your age, your face, your manners, everything tells me that you are innocent."

"I am guilty only of having wept over the death of the best of kings," replied the beautiful prisoner.

"Louis XVI had his virtues," answered my great-grandfather, "but what might not his glory have been if he had been faithful to that sublime Constitution until the end! . . ."

"What! sir!" exclaimed the young woman waving her dripping sponge, "you are a Jacobin and of the ruffians' party!"

"So, Madam! You belong to the faction of the enemies of France?" sighed Dussuel, who was half shaved. "Could one find fine feelings in an aristocrat?"

She was named Laville and had worn mourning for the king. During the four months that they were shut up together, she did not cease wrangling with her companion, nor taxing her ingenuity to do him service. Contrary to their expectation, their heads were not cut off; they were released on the evidence of Deputy Battelier, and Madame de Laville later became the best friend of my grandmother, who was then twenty-one years old and had been married for three years to Citizen Danger, adjutant-major in a voluntary battalion of the Haut.Rhin.

"He's a very handsome man," my grandmother used to say, "but I would not be sure of recognizing him in the street."

She declared that she had never seen him on the whole more than six hours on five occasions. She had married him because of a childish idea: in order to be able to wear her hair *à la Nation*. In reality, she did not want a husband. And he wanted all women. He went away; she let him go without bearing him the slightest grudge in the world.

As he departed for glory, Danger left all his wealth to his wife, in the drawer of a secretary desk, some receipts for money from a brother of his, Danger de Saint-Elme, an officer in Condé's army, and a packet of letters written by émigrés. There was enough there to have my grandmother guillotined and fifty persons along with her.

She really had some suspicion of this, and at each house inspection made in the neighborhood, she used to say to herself, "I must, however, burn these papers of my rascally husband's." But these ideas danced in her head. Yet she decided upon it one morning.

She had indeed chosen her time well!

Seated before the fireplace, she was sorting the papers in the secretary, after having spread them out pell-mell on the sofa. And she was peacefully making little piles, putting to one side what could be kept, to one side what must be destroyed. She was reading a line here, a line there, here a page, there a page, and her mind, travelling from memory to memory, pecked on the way some bits of the past, when suddenly she heard the front door opened. Immediately, by a sudden, instinctive insight, she knew that it was a house inspection.

She snatched up all the papers in an armful and threw them under the couch, the cover of which hung down to the floor. And, since they stuck out, she pushed them back under the piece of furniture with her foot. A corner of a letter was still sticking out like the tip of a little white kitten's ear

when a delegate from the committee for general safety came into the room with six men from the ward, armed with guns, sabers, and pikes. Madame Danger stood in front of the sofa. She thought that her ruin was not completely certain,* that she still had one little chance in a million, and that what was happening interested her very much.

"Citizeness," the president of the ward said to her, "you have been denounced for carrying on a correspondence with the enemies of the Republic. We have come to seize all your papers."

The man from the Committee of General Safety sat down on the sofa to write the report of the seizure.

Then these people searched through all the furniture, breaking the locks and emptying out the drawers. Finding nothing, they broke into the closets, upset the chests of drawers, took down the pictures, and pierced the armchairs and the mattresses with bayonets; but it was in vain. They sounded the walls with gun butts, they explored the chimneys and tore up some of the floor boards. Their trouble was for nothing. Finally, after three hours of fruitless searchings and useless ravages, tired, desperate, humiliated, they went away, promising to come back again. They had not thought of looking under the couch.

A few days later, as she was returning from the theater, my grandmother found at the door of her house an emaciated man, pale, disfigured by a dirty grey beard, who threw himself at her feet and said to her, "Citizeness Danger, I am Alcide. Save me!" She recognized him then.

"Goodness!" she said to him, "Can it be that you are M. Alcide, my dancing master? In what a condition do I see you again, M. Alcide!"

"I am proscribed, Citizeness, save me!"

*Literally: She thought that the certitude of her ruin was not completely entire.

"I can only try to. I am myself under suspicion, and my cook is a Jacobin. Follow me. But watch out that my janitor does not see you. He is a municipal officer."

They went up the staircase, and that good little Madame Danger shut herself up in her apartment with that deplorable Alcide, who was shivering with fever and kept repeating, his teeth chattering, "Save me, save me!"

Seeing him in such a pitiable state, she had a desire to laugh. The situation, however, was critical.

"Where to hide him?" my grandmother asked herself, casting a glance at the closets and the chests.

For want of finding him another place, she got the idea of putting him in her bed.

She pulled two mattresses out from the others, and thus making a space near the wall, she put Alcide there. The bed had a kind of rumpled look. She got in. Then, ringing for the cook: "Zoë, I am ill; give me chicken, some salad, and a glass of Bordeaux wine. Zoë, what news is there today?"

"There is a plot of those scoundrelly aristocrats, who seem to want to be guillotined down to the last one. But the Sans-Culottes have a sharp eye open.* We'll get them! We'll get them!† . . . The janitor told me that a rascal by the name of Alcide is being looked for in the ward, and that you can expect a house inspection tonight."

Alcide, between two mattresses, heard these sweet words. After Zoë's departure, he was overcome with nervous trembling that shook the whole bed, and his breathing became so painful that it filled the whole room with strident wheezing.

"Things are just fine,"‡ little Madame Danger said to herself.

And she ate her chicken's wing, and gave the unhappy Alcide a little bit§ of Bordeaux wine.

*Literally: . . . have the eye.

†Literally: It will go.

‡Literally: Here is what goes well.

§Literally: two fingers.

"Ah, Madame!" exclaimed Alcide. And he began to moan with more strength than sense.

"Marvelous!" said Madame Danger to herself, "the municipality has only to come . . ."

She was at this point in her thoughts when the noise of gun butts falling heavily on the ground shook the landing. Zoë brought in four municipal officers and thirty soldiers of the national guard.

Alcide stirred no more, and did not let the least breath be heard.

"Get up, Citizeness," said one of the guards.

Another objected that the citizeness could not get dressed in front of men.

A citizen, seeing a bottle of wine, seized it, tasted it, and the others gulped it down.

"Come now," said Madame Danger, "I see that you are nice people. Hurry up,* and look for everything that you have to look for, because I am dying for sleep."

They stayed for two deadly hours in the bedroom; twenty times, one after the other, they passed before the bed and looked to see if there was not anyone underneath. Then, having made a thousand rude remarks, they went away.

The last one had hardly left† when little Madame Danger, her head in the space between the bed and the wall, called, "M. Alcide! M. Alcide!"

A groaning voice replied, "Heavens! They can hear us. Madame, take pity on me!"

"M. Alcide," continued my grandmother, "How you frightened me! I did not hear you any more, I thought that you were dead, and, at the idea of sleeping with a dead man, I thought a thousand times that I would faint. M. Alcide, you did not behave well towards me. When one is not dead, one says so, for

*Literally: Do quickly . . . †Literally: hardly turned his heels . . .

goodness sakes! I shall never pardon you for the fright you gave me."

Wasn't my grandmother wonderful with her poor M. Alcide? She went to hide him the next day at Meudon and saved him nicely.

One would not suspect that the daughter of Dussuel the philosopher would have believed in miracles, nor have ventured upon the confines of the supernatural world. She had not a speck of religion, and her common sense, a bit limited, was offended by all mystery. However, this person, who was so reasonable, used to tell whoever wanted to listen to her about a marvelous event of which she had been witness.

When visiting her father at Récollets in Versailles, she had become acquainted with Madame de Laville, who was a prisoner there. When that lady was free, she went to live on the rue de Lancry in the same house as my grandmother. The two apartments opened on the same landing.

Madame de Laville lived with her young sister, who was named Amélie.

Amélie was tall and beautiful. Her pale face, set off by black hair, had an incomparable beauty of expression. Her eyes, filled with languor or with fire, looked about her for something unknown.

Canonness of a lay chapter at L'Argentière, while waiting for an establishment in the world, Amélie had experienced, it was said, when hardly more than a child,* the sorrows of a love that was not shared and which she was obliged to repress.

She seemed overcome by boredom. It would happen that she would burst into tears for no apparent reason. Sometimes she would remain for days in a stupid immobility, sometimes she would devour devotional books.

*Literally: From the departure from childhood . . .

Eaten up by her own chimeras, she writhed in indescribable sufferings.

Her sister's arrest, the death of several of her friends, guillotined as conspirators, and incessant alarms, succeeded in ruining her shattered health. She became frightfully thin. The drums which every day called the wards to arms, the bands of citizens in red caps, armed with pikes, which marched before her windows, singing, "We'll get them!" threw her into a state of terror which followed the alternatives of torpor or exaltation. Nervous troubles manifested themselves with terrible force and produced strange results.

Amélie had dreams whose vividness astonished those about her.

Wandering in the night, awake or asleep, she used to hear faraway noises, the sighs of victims. Sometimes, standing up, she would extend her arm, and, pointing in the shadow to something invisible, she would pronounce the name of Robespierre.

"She has," her sister would say, "sure presentiments, and she prophesies misfortunes."

Now on the night of 9 Thermidor, my grandmother as well as her father were in the two sisters' room. All four felt terribly worried, as they went over the serious events of the day and tried to divine the outcome of them. The tyrant, who had had an order for arrest issued against him, had been taken to the Luxembourg and had been denied entrance by the concierge, had then been taken to the police station on the Quai des Orfèvres, then handed over by the Commune and taken to the City Hall. . . .

Was he still there, and in what frame of mind, humiliated or threatening? All four felt a great anxiety, and heard nothing except at intervals the galloping of Hanriot's couriers who were dashing through the streets.* They waited, occa-

*Literally: . . . who were burning up the paving of the streets.

sionally sharing a memory, a doubt, a prayer. Amélie kept quiet.

Suddenly she gave a great cry.

It was one-thirty in the morning. Bending over a mirror, she seemed to contemplate a tragic scene.

She said, "I see him! I see him! How pale he is! The blood is running in streams from his mouth, his teeth and his jaws are broken. Praise, praise be to God! The drinker of blood will drink no more but his own! . . ."

As she finished these words, which she pronounced in a strange recitative tone, she uttered a cry of horror and fell backwards. She had lost consciousness.

At the same moment, in the council room of the City Hall, Robespierre received the pistol shot which broke his jaw and put an end to the Terror.

My grandmother, who was a freethinker, firmly believed in this vision.

How do you explain that?

I explain it by pointing out that my grandmother, free-thinker though she was, rather believed in the devil and the werewolf. As a young woman, all this witchcraft amused her, and she was, as people used to say, a great one for horoscopes. Later, she became afraid of the devil, but it was too late; he had her, she was no longer able not to believe in him.

The ninth of Thermidor made life endurable for the little group on the Rue de Lancry. My grandmother found this change very much to her taste; but it was impossible for her to hold any grudge against the men of the Revolution. She did not admire them—she never admired anyone but me—but she felt no hate for them; it never entered her mind to call them to account for the fear they had caused her. That is perhaps because they had not really caused her any fear. That is especially because my grandmother was a Republican,* a Re-

*Literally: a blue . . .

publican in her heart. And, as someone said, Republicans are always Republicans.

Meanwhile, Danger was continuing his brilliant career on all the battlefields. Always lucky, he was in full uniform at the head of his brigade, when he was killed by a cannon ball on April 20, 1808, in the glorious battle of Abensberg.

My grandmother learned through the Monitor that she was a widow, and that the brave General Danger "had been buried beneath laurels."

She exclaimed, "What a misfortune! Such a fine man!"

The next year she married M. Hippolyte Nozière, chief clerk at the Ministry of Justice, an honest, jovial man who used to play on the flute from six to nine in the morning, and from five to eight in the evening. This time it was a marriage for good. They loved each other, and, no longer being very young, they were sure of being indulgent towards each other. Caroline forgave Hippolyte for his eternal flute. And Hippolyte forgave Caroline for all the notions she had in her head. They were happy.

My grandfather Nozière is the author of Statistics of Prisons, Paris, Royal Printing House, 1817-19, 2 vol. in-4^o; and of Daughters of Momus, new songs, Paris, published by the author, 1821, in-18.

Gout caused him a great deal of constant trouble,* but it could not take his gaiety away from him, even by keeping him from playing on the flute; finally, it killed him. I did not know him. But I have his portrait there: he is shown in it in a blue suit, his hair as curly as a lamb's, his chin lost in an immense cravat.

"I shall regret him to my dying day," my grandmother used to say at eighty, having then been a widow for some fifteen years.

*Literally: one sees him there . . .

"You are really right, Madame," an old friend replied, "Nozière had all the virtues that make a good husband."

"All the virtues and all the faults, if you please," replied my grandmother.

"To be an accomplished husband, must you then have faults, Madame?"

"Goodness!" said my grandmother, shrugging her shoulders, "you must not have any vices, and that is a great fault."

She died July 4, 1853, in her eighty-first year.

3. The Tooth

If one took as much trouble hiding one's self as one usually does to display one's self, one would avoid many sorrows. I had a first experience of this at an early age.

It was a rainy day. I had received as a gift a whole stage-coach driver's outfit, cap, whip, reins, and sleigh bells. There were lots of bells. I was harnessed; it was I whom I harnessed to myself, for I was at the same time the driver, the horses, and the carriage. My route went from the kitchen to the dining room through a hallway. That dining room made a fine village square for me. The mahogany sideboard where I changed relays seemed to me to be the White Horse Inn with no difficulty. The hallway was for me a highway with its changing perspectives and its unforeseen encounters. Confined to a somber little space, I enjoyed a vast horizon and I experienced within those well-known walls the surprises which are the charm of journeys. It is because I was then a great magician. I called forth delightful beings for my amusement and I arranged nature as I wished. Since then, I have had the misfortune to lose this precious gift. I enjoyed it fully on that rainy day when I was a coachman.

This enjoyment should have been enough for my content-

ment; but is one ever content? A desire came over me to surprise, dazzle, astonish some spectators. My velvet cap and my sleigh bells were no longer anything to me if no one admired them. Since I heard my mother and father talking in the next room, I went in there with an outburst of noise. My father stared at me for a few seconds; then he shrugged his shoulders and said, "That child doesn't know what to do here. We must put him in school."

"His is still quite little," said my mother.

"Well, then," said my father, "they will put him with the little ones."

I understood these words only too well; those which followed partly escaped me, and if I can repeat them exactly, it is because they have been repeated to me several times since.

My father added, "This child, who has neither brothers nor sisters, is developing here in isolation a taste for dreaming which will be harmful to him later on. Solitude heightens his imagination, and I have noticed that his head is already full of chimeras. The children of his age with whom he will associate at school will give him experience of the world. He will learn from them what men are; he cannot learn it from you nor from me, whom he regards as guardian spirits. His companions will act with him as equals who must sometimes be pitied and defended, sometimes persuaded or fought with. He will serve with them his apprenticeship for social life."

"My dear," said my mother, "aren't you afraid that among these children there will be some bad ones?"

"The bad ones themselves," answered my father, "will be useful to him, if he is intelligent, for he will learn to distinguish them from the good, and that is a highly necessary knowledge. Moreover, you yourself will visit the

schools of the neighborhood, and you will choose a school frequented by children whose education corresponds to that which you have been able to give Pierre. Human nature is the same everywhere, but their 'nourishment,' as our ancients used to say, differs greatly from one place to another. A sound education, practiced for several generations, produces a flower of extreme delicacy, and this flower, which has cost a century to be formed, can be lost in a few days. Uneducated children could, through contact with them, cause the education of our son to degenerate without profit for them. Nobility of thought comes from God; that of manners is acquired by example and is fixed by heredity. It surpasses in beauty nobility of name. It is natural and is proved by its own grace, while the other is proved by some old papers that one does not know how to figure out."

"You are right, my dear," my mother answered. "I shall go first thing tomorrow to find a good school for our child. I shall choose it as you have said, and I shall assure myself that it is prosperous, for money worries distract the teacher's mind and embitter his character. What do you think, my dear, of a school run by a woman?"

My father did not answer.

"What do you think of it?" repeated my mother.

"It is a point that must be examined," said my father.

Seated in his armchair, before his roll-top desk, he had been examining for several minutes a kind of little bone, pointed at one end and all roughened at the other. He rolled it between his fingers; clearly he was also rolling it about in his thoughts, and, from that moment, with all my sleigh bells, I existed no more for him.

My mother, leaning on her elbows upon the back of a chair, was pursuing the idea which she had just expressed.

The doctor showed her the ugly little bone and said, "Here is the tooth of a man who lived in the time of the mammoths,

during the glacier age, in a cave once bare and desolate, now half covered with a Virginia creeper vine and with gillyflowers, and near which was raised several years ago that pretty white house in which we lived for two summer months in the year of our marriage. Those were two happy months. Since there was an old piano there, you used to play Mozart all day, my darling, and, thanks to you, a spiritual and charming music, which was wafted through the windows, animated that valley where the cavemen had heard only the tiger's howls."

My mother laid her head on my father's shoulder, and he continued thus: "This man knew nothing but fear and hunger. He was like an animal. His forehead was low. The muscles of his brows formed hideous wrinkles when contracted; his jaws made an enormous protrusion from his face; his teeth stuck out of his mouth. See how long and pointed this one is.

"Such was the first mankind. But insensibly, by slow and magnificent efforts, men, who had become less miserable, became less ferocious; their organs were modified by use. The habit of thought developed the brain, and the forehead grew larger. The teeth, which were no longer used to tear raw flesh, grew less long in a jaw that was less strong. The human face took on a sublime beauty, and the smile was born on the lips of woman."

Here my father kissed the cheek of my mother, who smiled; then, slowly raising above his head the caveman's tooth, he exclaimed, "Ancient man, whose rude, wild relic we have here, the recollection of you* stirs me in the most profound depth† of my being; I respect and love you, O my ancestor! Receive, in the unfathomable past in which you repose, the homage of my gratitude, for I know how much I owe you. I know that your efforts have spared me miseries. You did not

*Literally: . . . your recollection . . .

†Literally: . . . in the most profound of my being . . .

think of the future, it is true, a faint gleam of intelligence wavered in your obscure soul; you could scarcely think of anything but feeding yourself and hiding yourself. You were a man, however. An uncertain ideal pushed you towards what is beautiful and good to mankind. You lived in misery; you did not live in vain, and the frightful life which you received, you handed down a bit less bad to your children. They worked in their turn to make it better. They all put their hand to the arts; one invented the millstone, another the wheel. They all worked their hardest, and the continued effort of so many minds through the ages has produced the marvels which embellish life now. And each time that they invented an art or founded an industry, they gave birth to moral beauties through that fact itself, and created virtues. They gave veils to woman, and men knew the value of beauty.'

Here my father put the prehistoric tooth on his desk, and kissed my mother.

He spoke again. He said, "So we owe them everything, these ancestors, everything, and even love!"

I wanted to touch this tooth which had inspired in my father these words which I did not understand. I drew near the desk to take it. But, at the noise made by my bells, my father turned his head in my direction, looked at me seriously, and said, "Not so fast! the task is not finished. We should be less generous than the cavemen, if, our turn having come, we did not work to make life for our children more secure and better than it is for ourselves. There are two secrets for that: to love and to know. With knowledge and love the world is made."

"Doubtless, my dear," said my mother, "but the more I think of it, the more convinced I am that a little boy of our Pierre's age should be entrusted to a woman. I have heard of a Mlle Lefort. I shall go see her tomorrow."

4. The Discovery of Poetry

Mlle Lefort, who kept a school for young children in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, agreed to take me from ten to noon, and from two to four. I had a frightful idea of this school in advance, and when my nursemaid took me there for the first time, I thought myself lost.

Consequently, I was extremely surprised to see as I went into a large room five or six little girls and about a dozen little boys who were laughing, making faces, and giving signs of every sort of their unconcern and their mischievousness. I thought they were quite hardened.

I saw that in contrast Mlle Lefort was profoundly sad. Her blue eyes were moist and her lips parted.

Pale curls in the English style hung down her cheeks, like the melancholy branches of willows on the banks of rivers. She looked without seeing and seemed lost in a dream.

The sweetness of this sorrowful young lady and the gaiety of the children inspired me with confidence; at the bare thought that I was going to share the fate of several little girls, all my fears vanished.

Mlle Lefort, having given me a slate with a pencil, had me sit down next to a boy of my age who had keen eyes and a clever air.

"My name is Fontanet," he said to me, "and yours?"

Then he asked me what my father did. I told him that he was a doctor.

"Mine is a lawyer," answered Fontanet, "that is better."

"Why?"

"You don't see that it's nicer to be a lawyer?"

"No."

"Then it's because you are stupid."

Fontanet had a fertile mind. He advised me to raise silk

worms, and showed me a fine Pythagorean table which he had made himself. I admired Pythagoras and Fontanet. As for me, I knew nothing but fables.

As I left, I received from Mlle Lefort a good-conduct slip, the use of which I had not yet discovered. My mother explained to me that to have no utility was the special quality of honors. Then she asked me what I had done that first day. I answered that I had looked at Mlle Lefort.

She laughed at me, but I had told the truth. I have always been inclined to treat life as a spectacle. I have never been a true observer, for observation requires a system which directs it, and I have no system. The observer directs his gaze; the spectator allows himself to be guided by his eyes. I am a born spectator, and I shall retain all my life, I think, the ingenuousness of the loungers of the great city who are amused by everything, and who retain, in the age of ambition, the disinterested curiosity of little children. Of all the spectacles at which I have been present, the only one which has bored me is that which one sees in theaters while watching the stage. On the contrary, the performances of life have always diverted me, beginning with those which I saw in Mlle Lefort's school.

So I continued to look at my teacher, and, growing confirmed in the idea that she was sad, I asked Fontanet whence came this sadness. Without saying anything definite, Fontanet attributed it to remorse, and thought he remembered that it was suddenly graven on Mlle Lefort's features on the day, already long ago, when that person had, with no right, confiscated a boxwood top from him, and almost at once committed a new crime; for, in order to silence the wails of him whom she had robbed, she stuck a dunce cap on his head.

Fontanet thought that a soul sullied by these acts had lost joy and peace forever; but Fontanet's reasons were not enough for me and I looked for others.

It was difficult, to tell the truth, to look for anything in Mlle Lefort's class because of the uproar which always prevailed there. The pupils here indulged in great fights in front of Mlle Lefort, who was visible but absent. We used to throw each other so many catechism books and bread crusts that the air was darkened with them, and continual noise filled the room. The youngest children only, their feet in their hands and their tongues sticking out of their mouths, used to gaze at the ceiling with a peaceful smile.

Suddenly Mlle Lefort, entering the fray like a sleepwalker, would punish some innocent; then she would go back into her sadness as into a tower. Think, I beg you, of the state of mind of a little eight-year-old boy, who, in the midst of this incomprehensible tumult, wrote for six weeks on a slate: Hunger sent Malfilâtre forgotten to the grave. That was my task. At moments I would press my head in my hands to control my thoughts; but a single one was distinct; the thought of Mlle Lefort's sadness. Fontanet increased my curiosity with strange stories. He said that one could not spend the morning outside Mlle Lefort's rooms without hearing lamentable cries, mingled with the sounds of chains.

"I remember," he added, "that a long time ago, a month, perhaps, she read the whole class, sobbing, a story which was believed to be in verse."

There was an expression of horror in Fontanet's tale which moved me deeply. I had occasion to think, on the very next day, that this story was not imaginary, at least in regard to the reading aloud; but as for the chains which made Fontanet grow pale, I never knew anything about them, and I suppose today that the noise of these chains was in reality a noise of shovels and tongs.

Here is what happened the next day.

Mlle Lefort tapped on her table with a ruler for silence, coughed, and said in a hollow voice: "Poor Jane!" After a

pause she added:

“Of the virgins of the hamlet, Jane was most fair.”

Fontanet poked me in the chest with his elbow, as he broke into peals of laughter. Mlle Lefort cast him an indignant look; then, in a voice sadder than the penitential psalms, she went on with the story of poor Jane. It is probable and even certain that this story was in verse from one end to the other, but I am really obliged to tell it as I have remembered it. The scattered limbs of the broken-up poet will be recognized in my prose, I hope.

Jane was engaged. She had plighted her troth to a young and valiant mountaineer. Oswald was the name of this happy shepherd. Already everything is prepared for the wedding, Jane's friends bring her the veil and bridal wreath. Happy Jane! But a languor comes over her. Her cheeks are covered with a deadly pallor. Oswald comes down from the mountain. He runs and says to her, “Aren't you my companion?” She replies in a faint voice, “Dear Oswald, farewell! I am dying!” Poor Jane! . . . The village bells which were to have rung for her wedding will ring for her funeral.

There were in this tale a great number of words which I heard for the first time, and the meaning of which I did not know; but the whole of it seemed so sad and so beautiful to me that I felt, as I listened to it, an unknown thrill; the charm of melancholy had been revealed to me by some thirty bad verses, the literal meaning of which I should have been unable to explain. That is because, unless one is old, one does not need much understanding to feel a great deal. Obscure things can be touching things, and it is indeed true that vagueness pleases young minds.

The tears gushed from my over-burdened heart, and neither with his funny faces nor his jeers could Fontanet stop my sobs. However, I did not then doubt Fontanet's superiority. He had to become under-secretary of state to make me doubt it.

My tears were pleasing to Mlle Lefort. She called me to her, and said to me, "Pierre Nozière, you wept; here is the cross of honor. Learn that it is I who wrote that poetry. I have a big notebook filled with verses as beautiful as those; but I have not yet found a publisher to print them. Isn't that horrible and even inconceivable?"

"Oh! mademoiselle," I said to her, "I am really happy. Now I know the cause of your sorrow. You love poor Jane who died in the hamlet, and it is because you are thinking of her, isn't it, that you are sad and never notice what we are doing in class?"

Unfortunately, these words displeased her, for she looked at me with rage and said: "Jane is a fiction. You are a fool. Give back that cross and return to your seat."

I went back to my seat crying. This time, it was for myself that I wept, and I declare that these new tears did not have that kind of sweetness which had been mingled with those which poor Jane had evoked. One thing increased my confusion: I did not know at all what a fiction was. Fontanet did not know it, either.

I asked my mother about it when I returned home. "A fiction," answered my mother, "is a lie."

"Ah, Mama," I said to her, "it is a misfortune that Jane should be a lie."

"What Jane?" asked my mother.

"Of the virgins of the hamlet, Jane was most fair."

And I told Jane's story just as I remembered it.

My mother gave me no reply, but I heard what she whispered in my father's ear, "What poor stuff that child is taught."

"Very poor stuff, indeed," said my father. "What do you expect a spinster to know about pedagogy? I have a system of education which I shall reveal to you one day. According to this system, a child of our Pierre's age must be taught the habits of the animals he resembles in appetites and intelli-

gence. Pierre is capable of understanding the dog's fidelity, an elephant's devotion, a monkey's roguish pranks. That is what he must be told about, and not this Jane, this hamlet, and these bells, which have no common sense."

"You are right," answered my mother. "The child and the animal understand each other very well, they are both close to the soil. But, believe me, my dear, there is something which children understand even better than monkeys' tricks; that is the noble deeds of great men. Heroism is as clear as the day, even for a little boy; and, if Pierre were told about the death of the Knight of Assas, he would understand it, with God's help, as you and I do."

"Alas!" sighed my father, "I think, on the contrary, that heroism is understood in different ways, according to the times, the places, and the persons. But that does not matter; what matters in the sacrifice is the sacrifice itself. If the object to which one is devoted is an illusion, the devotion is no less a reality; and this reality is the most splendid jewel with which man can adorn his moral wretchedness. Dear love, your natural generosity has made you understand these truths better than I understand them myself with the aid of experience and reflection. I shall include them in my system."

So reasoned the doctor and my mother.

A week later, I wrote for the last time on my slate, in the midst of the tumult: Hunger sent Malfitre forgotten to the grave.

Fontanet and I left Mlle Lefort's school together.

5. Abbé Jubal's Magic Spell

It was with a heart full of fear and pride that I entered the eighth preparatory grade. The teacher of that class, Abbé Jubal, was not very terrible in himself; he did not have the look of a cruel man; he had rather the air of a young lady.

But he sat in a big, high, black chair, and that made him frightening to me. He had a sweet voice and glance, curly hair, white hands, a benevolent soul. He looked like a sheep, more, perhaps, than was seemly for a teacher.

My mother, having seen him one day in the school reception room, murmured, "He is indeed young!" And that was said in a certain way.

I began to fear him no more when I saw myself obliged to admire him. That happened while I was reciting my lesson, which consisted of some verses by the Abbé Gauthier on the first kings of France.

I said each verse all in one breath and as if it had been made of a single word:

Pharamond was it is said the first of these kings

Whom the Franks in Gaul raised on their shields

Clodion took Cambrai, then reigned Meroveus . . .

At that point, I stopped suddenly and repeated: Meroveus, Meroveus, Meroveus. This rhyme, combining the useful with the pleasing, reminded me that when Meroveus reigned,* Lutetia was preserved* . . . But from what? It was quite impossible for me to say it, having completely forgotten it. The matter, I declare, had not made a strong impression on me.† I had an idea that Lutetia was an old lady. I was glad that she had been preserved, but her affairs, in short, interested me very little. Unfortunately, M. Jubal seemed to attach a great deal of importance to what I said about the harm from which she had been preserved. I said: "Uh . . . Meroveus . . . uh, uh, uh." I would have given my tongue to the cat for a trifle if it had only been the custom in the eighth preparatory grade. My neighbor, Fontanet, was making fun of me, and M. Jubal was filing his nails. Finally:

"From the furies of Attila, Lutetia was preserved," he

*These words rhyme in French.

†Literally: The matter . . . had struck me little.

said to me. "Since you had forgotten this verse, M. Nozière, you should have made it over, instead of being stuck. You could say:

"From Attila's invasion Lutetia was preserved, or:

"From gloomy Attila Lutetia was preserved, or, more elegantly:

"From terrible Attila, called the Scourge of God, Lutetia was preserved. You can change the words, provided that you respect the meter."

I got a bad mark; but the Abbé Jubal acquired great prestige in my eyes because of his poetic facility. This prestige was to increase still more.

M. Jubal, whose duties bound him to Noel and Chapsal's grammar and to Abbé Gauthier's History of France, did not neglect moral and religious instruction, however.

One day, I do not know in what connection, he assumed a serious air and said to us, "Children, if you had to receive a minister of state you would be eager to do him the honors of your house, as to a representative of the sovereign. Well, then, what homages ought you not to pay to priests who represent God on the earth? As much as God is above kings, so is the priest above ministers of state."

I had never received a minister, and was not counting on receiving one for a long time. I was even certain that if one came to the house, my mother would send me to eat with the maids that day, since that was what was done, unfortunately, at each formal dinner. I understood, nonetheless, that priests are enormously respectable, and, applying this truth to M. Jubal, I felt a great uneasiness. I recalled having attached, in his presence, a paper puppet to Fontanet's back. Was that respectful? Would I have attached a paper puppet to Fontanet's back in the presence of a minister of state? Assuredly not. And yet I had attached this paper puppet unknown to him, it is true, but in the presence of Abbé

Jubal, who is above ministers. He was even sticking out his tongue, this puppet was! My soul was enlightened. I lived overcome with remorse. My resolution was to honor Abbé Jubal, and, if it happened afterwards that I stuffed little pebbles down Fontanet's neck during class and drew men on Abbé Jubal's chair itself, I did it at least with the satisfaction of knowing that the whole business was my fault.

It was granted to me, some time after that, to measure Abbé Jubal's spiritual greatness.

I was in the chapel, waiting with two or three friends for my turn to be confessed. The sun* was going down. The light of the perpetual lamp was making the golden stars on the darkened vault twinkle. At the back of the choir, the painted Virgin was effaced with the vagueness of an apparition. The altar was filled with gilded vases, full of flowers; an odor of incense was floating on the air; one confusedly glimpsed a thousand things, and boredom, even boredom, that great disease of children took on a sweet hue in the atmosphere of that chapel. I seemed to me that from the side of the altar, it† touched upon paradise.

The sun* had set. Suddenly I saw Abbé Jubal, with a lantern, advancing to the choir. He made a deep genuflexion, then, opening the grating, he went up the steps of the altar. I watched him; he undid a package from which came garlands of artificial flowers, which resembled those wreaths of cherries which old women sell us in the streets during the month of July. And I marvelled at seeing my teacher drawing near the Immaculate Conception. You put a pinch of tacks in your mouth, Abbe; I feared at first that it was only to swallow them, but it was to keep them within reach of your hand. For you got up on a stool, and you began to fasten the garlands about the Holy Virgin's niche. But you would get down from your stool from time to time to judge

*Literally: the day.

†I.e., the chapel.

the effect of your work from a distance; and you were content with it; your cheeks were rosy, your eye was clear; you would have smiled, except for the tacks which you held between your teeth. And as for me, I admired you with all my heart. And, although the lantern which was on the ground lit up your nostrils in a comical fashion, I found you very beautiful. I understood that you were above the ministers of state, as you had implied to us in a clever speech. I thought that mounting a white horse all decked out in plumes to win a battle was not as fine and desirable a thing as hanging garlands on the wall of a chapel. I knew that my vocation was to imitate you.

I imitated you that very evening at home, by cutting with my mother's scissors all the paper that I could find, and from which I made garlands. My lessons suffered from it. My French exercise suffered from it especially in considerable proportions.

This exercise was from a manual by a M. Coquempot, whose book was a cruel book. I hold no grudge, and, if this author had had a less memorable name, I should generously have forgotten him. But Coquempot* is not forgotten. I do not wish to take unfair advantage of him because of this chance circumstance. However, may I be permitted to be astonished that such painful exercises have to be done to learn a language which is called maternal and which my mother used to teach me very well, simply by talking before me. For she spoke wonderfully, my mother did!

But Abbé Jubal was convinced† of Coquempot's usefulness, and, as he could not understand my reasons,‡ he gave me a bad mark. The school year was completed without any notable incident. Fontanet began to raise caterpil-

*In French, this name sounds like "chicken in the pot."

†Literally: penetrated by . . .

‡Literally: could not enter into my reasons . . .

lars in his desk. So I raised some, too, out of vanity, although they filled me with horror. Fontanet hated Coquempot, this hate reunited us. At the mere name of Coquempot, we would exchange looks of understanding and expressive grimaces from our seats. That avenged us. Fontanet confided to me that if any more Coquempot were done in the eighth form, he would hire himself out as a cabin boy on a big ship. This resolution pleased me and I promised Fontanet to join up with him. We swore friendship to each other.

On the day of the distribution of prizes, we were unrecognizable, Fontanet and I. That was doubtless because of the fact that our hair was combed. Our new coats, our white trousers, the canvas awning, the crowd of parents, the platform draped with flags, all that inspired in me the feeling of a great spectacle. The books and wreaths formed a dazzling pile, in which I anxiously sought to make out my share, and I shivered in my seat. But Fontanet, who was wiser, did not question fate. He maintained an admirable calm. Turning his little ferret's head in every sense, he pointed out the misshapen noses of the fathers and the ridiculous hats of the mothers with a presence of mind of which I was incapable.

Music burst out. The principal, wearing over his cassock his little ceremonial cape, appeared on the platform beside a general in full uniform and at the head of the teachers. They took their places, according to rank, behind the general; first, the assistant principal, then the teachers of the higher grades, then M. Schuwer, singing teacher, M. Trouillon, writing teacher, and Sergeant Morin, gym teacher. M. Jubal appeared last and sat down in the very back on a poor little stool, which, for want of room, had only three feet on the platform, and pushed into the curtain with the fourth. But Abbé Jubal could not keep this humble place long. New-comers pushed him back into a corner where he disappeared

beneath a flag. A table was put on him, and that was all. Fontanet was greatly amused by this eclipse. As for me, I was amazed that a person who excelled in flowers and in poetry, and who represented God on earth, should be left thus in a corner like a cane or an umbrella.

6. *Fontanet's Cap*

Every Saturday, we were taken to confession. If any one can tell me why, it will give me pleasure. This practice inspired me with a great deal of respect and boredom. I do not think that the chaplain took a real interest in hearing my sins; but it was certainly unpleasant for me to tell them to him. The first difficulty was to find them. You will believe me, perhaps if I tell you that at the age of ten I did not possess psychic powers and the methods of analysis which would have allowed me to explore my inward conscience rationally.

However, you had to have sins; for, no sins, no confession. I had been given, it is true, a little book which contained them all. I had only to choose. But the choice itself was difficult. There were so many of them, and some so obscure, about larceny, simony, prevarication, and concupiscence! I found in this little book: "I accuse myself of having listened to evil conversations." That still failed to embarrass me greatly.

That is why I usually kept to the chapter about distractions. Distractions at Mass, distractions at meals, distractions at "assemblies," I declared them all, and the deplorable emptiness of my conscience filled me with great shame.

I was humiliated not to have any sins.

One day, at last, I thought of Fontanet's cap; I had my sin, I was saved!

From this day on, every Saturday I unburdened myself at the chaplain's feet of the weight of Fontanet's cap.

Because of the way in which I damaged in it the property of my neighbor, this cap filled me for several minutes every Saturday with lively fears about the welfare of my soul. I used to fill it up with sand; I used to throw it up into the trees, from which it had to be struck down, like an unripe fruit, by throwing stones; I made a rag of it to wipe away chalk drawings on the blackboard; I threw it down a ventilating shaft into inaccessible cellars, and, when, at the end of school, the ingenious Fontanet succeeded in getting it back, it was only a filthy rag.

But a fairy watched over its fate, for it would appear the next morning on Fontanet's head with the unforeseen look of a clean cap, respectable, almost elegant. And that every day. That fairy was Fontanet's older sister. From this single trait, she could be considered a good housekeeper.

More than once, as I was kneeling at the foot of the holy bench, Fontanet's cap would plunge, because of my action, to the bottom of the basin in the court of honor. There was then something delicate about my situation.

And what emotion animated me against this cap? Vengeance

Fontanet used to persecute me because of a school bag of an old-fashioned and bizarre shape which my uncle, an economical man, had given me, to my misfortune. It was much too large for me, and I was much too small for it. Moreover, this school bag did not look like a school bag because it was not one. It was an old briefcase which opened out like an accordion, and on which my uncle's shoemaker had put a strap.

This briefcase was hateful to me, not without reason. But I do not now think that it was ugly enough to deserve all the indignities done to it. It was of red morocco, with lots of lacy gold tooling, and bore above a copper lock a crown and a scratched coat of arms. Faded silk, which had been blue, lined it inside. If it still existed, with what attention would I examine it! For, when I remember the crown, which must

have been a royal crown, and the coat of arms, on which could still be seen (unless I have dreamed it) three fleur-de-lys, badly scratched out by a penknife, I suspect today that this briefcase must originally have been the briefcase of one of Louis XVI's ministers.

But Fontanet, who did not think of it at all in regard to its past, could not see it on my back without throwing snowballs at it or horse chestnuts, according to the season, and rubber balls all year long.

As a matter of fact, my comrades and Fontanet himself had only one grievance against my school bag: its strangeness. It was not like the others; from that came all the troubles which it caused me. Children have a brutal feeling for equality. They will allow nothing distinctive nor original. It is this characteristic which my uncle had not sufficiently observed when he gave me his pernicious present. Fontanet's school bag was frightful; since his two older sisters had dragged it turn by turn over the school seats, it could no longer be soiled; its leather was peeled and cracked; the vanished buckles had been replaced by strings; but, as it had nothing extraordinary about it, Fontanet never suffered any annoyance because of it. And I, when I came into the school yard, my briefcase on my back, I was immediately deafened by hoots, surrounded, shoved, pushed down flat on my stomach. Fontanet called that making me play turtle, and he would get up on my shell. He was not very heavy, but I was humiliated. As soon as I was back up, I would leap upon his cap.

His cap was always new, and my school bag indestructible, alas! And our deeds of violence were bound together by an inexorable fate, like the crimes of the ancient house of the Atrides.

7. *The Last Words of Decius Mus*

This morning, as I was leafing through old books on the quais, I found in a two-penny box an odd volume of Titus Livius. As I was turning the pages at random, I came across this sentence: "The remnants of the Roman army reached Canasium under cover of the night," and this sentence brought back to me the memory of M. Chotard. Now, when I think of M. Chotard, it is for a long time.* I was still thinking of him as I came home at dinner time. And, since I had a smile on my lips, I was asked the cause of it.

"The cause, my children, is M. Chotard."

"Who is this Chotard who makes you smile?"

"I am going to tell you about him. If I bore you, pretend to listen, and let me think that it is not to himself that the stubborn storyteller tells his tales."

I was fourteen years old and I was in the third grade. My teacher, who was named Chotard, had the florid complexion of an old monk, and he had been one.

Brother Chotard, after having been one of the gentlest sheep of Saint Francis' fold, threw his cowl to the winds† in 1830, and took up laymen's clothes, without always succeeding in wearing them with elegance. What reason did Brother Chotard have to act this way? Some said it was love; others said that it was fear, and that after the Three Glorious Days of the Revolution,‡ when the sovereign people had thrown some cabbage stumps at the capuchin friars of . . . , Brother Chotard jumped over the convent walls to spare his persecutors such a great sin as maltreating a capuchin friar.

This good brother was a learned man. He took his degrees, gave lessons, and lived so long and so well that he was getting grey of hair, florid of cheek, and red of nose when I

*Literally: a good moment . . . †Literally: . . . to the nettles . . .

‡Literally: . . . the Three Glorious . . .

was led with my comrades to the foot of his chair.

What a warlike third form teacher we had there! He had to be seen, when, textbook in hand, he led Brutus' soldiers to Philippi. What courage! What greatness of soul! what heroism! But he chose his time to be a hero, and this time was not present time. M. Chotard revealed himself as uneasy and fearful in the course of life. He was easily frightened.

He was afraid of robbers, of mad dogs, of thunder, of carriages, and of all that could, from near or far, hurt an honest man's hide.

It is true to say that his body only remained among us; his soul was in ancient times. This excellent man lived at Thermopylae with Leonidas; in the Salaminian sea on Themistocles' ship; on the battlefields of Canna, near Paulus Emilius; he fell bleeding in Lake Trasimene, where, later, a fisherman would find his Roman knight's ring. He defied Caesar and the gods at Pharsalia; he brandished his broken sword over Varus' corpse in the Hercynian forest. He was a famous man of war.

Determined to sell his life dearly on the banks of the Aegospotamos, and proud of draining the freedom-giving cup in besieged Numantia, M. Chotard in no way disdained recourse to the most treacherous stratagems with the wily captains.

"One stratagem which must be recommended," M. Chotard said to us one day, while commenting upon a text of Aelianus, "is to draw the enemy army into a mountain pass and to crush it beneath blocks of stone."

He did not tell us if the enemy army had often been obliging enough to lend itself to this manoeuvre. But I am in haste to come to the point at which Chotard made himself illustrious in the minds of his pupils.

He gave us as the subject of compositions, Latin as well as French, combats, sieges, ceremonies of expiation and propitiation, and it was in dictating the correction of these narratives that he employed all his eloquence. His style and delivery

expressed in both languages the same martial ardor. Sometimes it happened that he would interrupt the flow of his idea to mete out deserved punishments, but the tone of his voice remained heroic even in the interpolations; so that, speaking turn about with the same accept as a consul exhorting his troops, and as a third-form teacher giving out extra assignments, he would throw the pupils' minds into a state of confusion that was all the greater because it was impossible to tell if it was the consul or the teacher who was speaking. He happened one day to surpass himself in this field by an incomparable speech. We all knew this speech by heart; I was careful to write it in my notebook without omitting anything.

Here it is as I heard it, as I hear it still, for it seems to me that M. Chotard's rich voice still resounds in my ears and fills them with its monotonous solemnity.

LAST WORDS OF DECIUS MUS

"Ready to dedicate himself to the gods of the dead, and already pressing his spur into the flanks of his impetuous courser, Decius Mus turned back one last time toward his companions in arms and said to them:

"If you do not maintain silence better, I shall inflict a general detention upon you. I am entering into immortality for the fatherland. The abyss awaits me. I am going to die for the common welfare. M. Fontanet, you will copy ten pages of Latin grammar* for me. So has Jupiter Capitolinus, eternal guardian of the Eternal City, decided in his wisdom. M. Nozière, if, as it seems to me, you pass your lesson again to M. Fontanet for him to copy, according to his habit, I shall write to your father. It is just and necessary that a citizen sacrifice himself to the common welfare. Envy me and do not weep for me. It is stupid to laugh without cause. M. Nozière, you will be kept in Thursday. My example will

*Literally: rudiment.

live among you. Gentlemen, your snickerings are of an impropriety which I cannot tolerate. I shall inform the director of your conduct. And I shall see from the heart of Elysium, open to the shades of heroes, virgins of the republic hanging garlands of flowers at the base of my statues."

I had at that time a prodigious aptitude for laughter. I exercised it entirely upon the last words of Decius Mus, and, whenafter having given us the most powerful cause for laughter, M. Chotard added that it is stupid to laugh without cause, I hid my head in a dictionary and I lost consciousness. Those who have not been shaken at fifteen by crazy laughter beneath a hail of extra assignments are ignorant of a pleasure.

But it must not be thought that I was capable only of trifling in class. I was a good little humanist after my fashion. I felt strongly what was pleasant and noble in what is so well named *belles-lettres*.

I had even then a taste for fine Latin and fine French which I have not yet lost, despite the advice and the examples of my more fortunate contemporaries. In this respect, there has happened to me what commonly happens to people whose beliefs are disdained. I took pride in what was perhaps only folly. I persisted in my taste in literature and I have remained a classicist. I may be treated as an aristocrat and as a mandarin, but I think that six or seven years of literary culture give to the mind well prepared to receive it a nobility, an elegant power, a beauty, which is not obtained by other means.

As for me, I tasted Sophocles and Virgil with delight. M. Chotard, I declare, M. Chotard, aided by Titus Livius, inspired me with sublime dreams. Children's imagination is marvellous. And quite magnificent pictures pass through the heads of little rascals! When he did not cause me a laughing fit, M. Chotard filled me with enthusiasm.

Each time that he slowly pronounced this phrase with his rich, old sermonizer's voice: "The remains of the Roman

army reached Canasium under cover of the night," I used to see passing silently in the moonlight, in the bare countryside, over a path edged by tombs, livid faces, soiled with blood and dust, with helmets dented, breastplates tarnished and battered, and swords broken. And that vision, half veiled, which would fade away slowly, was so solemn, so sad, and so proud that my heart would leap within my breast with sorrow and admiration.

8. *The Humanities*

I am going to tell you what the stormy autumn sky, the first dinners by lamp light, and the yellowing leaves on the trembling trees recall to me every year; I am going to tell you what I see when I walk through the Luxembourg in the first days of October, when it is a bit sad and more beautiful than ever; for it is the time when the leaves fall one by one upon the white shoulders of the statues. What I see, then, in this garden is a little fellow, who, with his hands in his pockets and his school bag on his back, is going to school, hopping along like a sparrow. My thought alone sees him; for this little fellow is a ghost; he is the ghost of the "I" that I was twenty-five years ago. Really, he interests me, this little one; when he existed, I hardly cared about him; but now that he is no more, I love him well. He was worth more, on the whole, than the other I's I have had after having lost that one. He was quite light-headed; but he was not bad, and I ought to do him this justice because he has not left me a single bad memory; it was an innocent that I lost. It is quite natural that I should regret him; it is quite natural that I should see him in thought, and that my mind should be amused to revive his memory.

Twenty-five years ago, at the same season, before eight o'clock, he used to cross this beautiful garden to go to school.

His heart was a bit sad; it was the opening of school.*

However, he trotted on, his books on his back and his top in his pocket. The idea of seeing his comrades again brought some joy back to his heart. He had so many things to tell and to listen to. Did he not have to know if Laboriette had had good hunting in the forest of Aigle? Did he not himself have to reply that he had gone horseback riding in the mountains of Auvergne? When you do such a thing, it is not in order to keep it hidden. And then it is so good to see one's friends again. How eager he was to see his friend Fontanet again, who made fun of him in such a nice way, Fontanet, who, no fatter than a rat and wilier than Ulysses, took the first place everywhere with natural grace.

He felt completely light-hearted at the thought of seeing Fontanet again. It was thus that he crossed the Luxembourg in the fresh air of the morning. Everything that he saw then, I see today. It is the same sky and the same earth; things have their soul of former days, their soul which cheers me and saddens me and troubles me; he himself is no more.

That is why, as I grow older, I interest myself more and more in the reopening of school.

If I had been a boarder in a preparatory school, the memory of my studies would be cruel and I would chase them away. But my parents did not send me to this prison. I was a day student in an old preparatory school that was a bit monastic and hidden away; I saw the street and the house every day, and was not cut off, like the boarders, from public life and private life. So my feelings were not those of a slave; they developed with that gentleness and that power which freedom gives to all develop within it. No hate was mingled with them. Curiosity was good, and it was in order to love that I wanted to know. Everything that I saw going along the street, men, animals, things, contributed, more

*Literally: the return.

than one can believe, in making me conscious of life in its simple and strong aspects.*

Nothing is equal to the street for making a child understand the social machine. He must have seen, in the morning, the milkmaids, the water-carriers, the coal seller; he must have examined the stores of the grocer, the pork butcher, and the wine merchant; he must have seen the regiments passing, music at the head; he must, finally, have inhaled the air of the street to feel that the law of work is divine and that everyone must do his task in this world. From these trips in the morning and in the evening, from home to school and from school to home, I have retained an affectionate curiosity toward the trades and tradespeople.

I ought to declare, however, that I did not have an equal friendship for all. The stationers who displayed in their shop windows pictures from *Épinal* were my favorites first. How many times, my nose glued against the windowpane, have I read the story of these little illustrated dramas from one end to the other!

I knew many of them in a short time; there were some fantastic ones which set my imagination working and developed in me that faculty without which one finds nothing, even in the stuff of experiences and in the exact sciences. There were some which, representing lives in a naive and striking way, made me look for the first time at the most terrible thing, or to express it better, the only terrible thing, fate. In a word, I owe a great deal to the pictures from *Épinal*.

Later, at fourteen or fifteen years, I hardly stopped any longer before the grocers' displays, whose boxes of candied fruits, however, seemed admirable to me for a long time. I disdained the notion stores, and no longer sought to figure out the meaning of the enigmatic "Y," which shines in gold on their signs. I hardly stopped to decipher the naive re-

*Literally: . . . life in what it has of simple and of strong.

buses, worked out on the storied grillwork of the old wine shops, where one sees a quince or a comet in wrought iron.

My mind, which had become more discerning, was no longer interested in anything but the print sellers' shops, in displays of bric-a-brac, and in boxes of old books.

O, old Jews of the rue du Cherche-Midi! innocent booksellers of the quais, my masters, how much gratitude I owe you! As much and more than the professors of the University, you gave me my intellectual education. Good people, you displayed before my delighted eyes the mysterious forms of past life and every sort of precious monument of human thought. It was as I rummaged in your boxes, contemplated your dusty displays, filled with shabby relics of our fathers and their fine thoughts, that I insensibly absorbed the soundest philosophy.

Yes, my friends, by frequenting old books gnawed by worms, rusty ironworks, and worm-eaten wainscoting, that you sold to make a living, I acquired, while still a child, a profound feeling of the transitoriness of things and of the nothingness of all. I divined that human beings are only changing images in the universal illusion, and from then on, I was inclined to sadness, gentleness, and pity.

The school of the outdoors taught me, as you see, noble sciences. The school of home life was still more profitable for me. The family dinners, so sweet when the decanters were clear, the linen white, and the faces peaceful, the daily dinner with its familiar conversation, gives the child the taste for and the understanding of household things, of the humble and holy things in life. If he has the good fortune to have, as I did, parents who are intelligent and good, the table talk which he hears gives him good judgment and the taste for loving. Every day he eats the blessed bread which the spiritual father broke and gave to the pilgrims in the inn at Emmaus. And he says to himself as they did, "My heart is all hot within me."

The meals which the boarding students take in the refectory have none of this sweetness and this virtue. Oh, what a good school is the school of home!

However, my thought would be quite badly understood,* if it were supposed that I despise classical studies. I think that to form a mind nothing equals the study of the two antiquities according to the methods of the old French humanists. This beautiful word, "humanities," quite beautiful as it is, has not too much nobility to designate the arts which make a man, according to the highest ideal than can be conceived of one.

The little fellow of whom I was just speaking to you with a sympathy that will perhaps be forgiven me, by thinking that it is not at all egotistical and that it belongs to a shade, this little fellow who used to cross the Luxembourg, hopping along like a sparrow, was, I beg you to believe it, a rather good humanist. In his childish soul, he had a feeling for Roman power and the great images of ancient poetry. Everything that he saw and felt in his fortunate liberty as a day-pupil, who strolls among the shops and dines with his parents, did not make him at all insensible to the fine language which was taught at the school. Far from it: he was as attic and as Ciceronian, almost, as one can be in a gang of little scribblers, ruled over by good old greybeard schoolmasters.

He worked little for glory and hardly shone on the list of prize-winners, but he worked a great deal for what interested him, as La Fontaine said. His translations were very well turned, and his Latin discourses would have deserved praises, even of the School Inspector, if it had not been for some grammatical errors which spoiled it in general. Has he not already told you that at twelve, the narrations of Titus Livius drew from him noble tears?

But it was as he approached Greece that he saw beauty in its magnificent simplicity. He came to it late. Aesop's fables

*Literally: One would enter my thought quite badly . . .

had first darkened his soul. A hunchbacked teacher, hunchbacked of body and soul, explained them. Can you imagine Thersytes leading the young Galateans into the groves of the Muses? The little fellow could not conceive that. You might think that his hunchbacked pedagogue, specially devoting himself to explaining Aesop's fables, was admissable for this employment; not at all! he was a false hunchback, a giant hunchback, without intelligence and without humanity, inclined toward evil, and the most unjust of men. He was worth nothing, not even to explain a hunchback's thoughts. Moreover, these nasty, dry, little fables, which bear Aesop's name, have reached us pared down by a Byzantine monk, who had a narrow, sterile skull beneath his tonsure. In fifth form I did not know their origin, and I cared little about knowing it; but I judged them exactly as I judge them at present.

After Aesop, we were given Homer. I saw Thetis rise like a white cloud above the sea, I saw Nausicaa and her companions, and the palm tree of Delos, and the sky and the earth and the sea, Andromache's smile through her tears . . . I understood, I felt. It was impossible for me for six months to emerge from the Odyssey. It was the cause of numerous punishments for me. But what did extra assignments mean to me? I was with Ulysses "on the purple sea." Then I discovered the tragic poets. I did not understand much of Aeschylus; but Sophocles, but Euripides opened for me the enchanted world of heroes and heroines and initiated me into the poetry of unhappiness. With each tragedy that I read, there were new joys and tears, and new thrills.

Antigone and Alcestis gave me the noblest dreams that ever a child has had. My head buried in my dictionary, on my ink-stained desk, I used to see divine figures, with ivory arms falling upon white tunics, and I used to hear voices more beautiful than the most beautiful music, which lamented harmoniously.

That again brought me new punishments. They were fair; I was busying myself with things foreign to the classroom. Alas! the habit remains with me. In whatever class of life I am placed for the rest of my days, I still fear, that as an old man, I shall incur the reproach which my second-form teacher gave me: "M. Pierre Nozière, you are occupying yourself with things foreign to the class."

But it was especially on winter nights, on leaving school, that I was intoxicated in the streets with that light and that song. I read beneath the street lamps and before the lit-up shop windows the verses which I recited then in a subdued voice as I walked along. The activity of winters' nights reigned in the narrow streets of the neighborhood which the darkness was already enveloping.

It often happened that I bumped into some delivery boy, who, his basket on his head, was pursuing his dream as I pursued mine, or that I suddenly felt on my cheek the hot breath of some poor horse who was pulling his cart. Reality never spoiled my dream, because I loved well my old neighborhood streets, the stones of which had seen me grow up. One evening, I read some verses from *Antigone* beneath a chestnut vendor's lantern, and I cannot, after a quarter of a century, recall those verses:

O tomb! O nuptial couch! . . .

without seeing again the man from Auvergne blowing into a paper bag and feeling beside me the warmth of the frying pan in which the chestnuts were roasting. And the recollection of this good fellow does not spoil for me the melodious lamentations of the Theban virgin.

Thus I learned many verses. This I acquired useful and valuable knowledge. Thus I studied my humanities.

My method was good for me; it would be worth nothing for another. Far be it from me to recommend it to anyone.

As a matter of fact, I ought to confess to you that, nour-

ished by Homer and Sophocles, I lacked taste when I entered the first form. It was my teacher who said so to me, and I willingly believe it. The taste that one has or that one displays at seventeen is rarely good. To improve mine, my teacher of rhetoric recommended to me the careful study of the complete works of Casimir Delavigne. I did not follow his recommendation. Sophocles had given me a certain bent that I could not destroy. This teacher of rhetoric did not seem to me and still does not seem to me a man of fine literary taste; but he had a melancholy mind, an upright character, and a proud soul. If he taught us some literary heresies, he at least showed us, by his example, what an honest man is.

This knowledge has a real value. M. Charron was respected by all his pupils. For children appreciate with perfect justice the moral value of their teachers. What I thought twenty-five years ago of the offensive hunchback and of the good Charron, I still think today.

But evening falls on the plane trees of the Luxembourg, and the little phantom which I had evoked is lost in the darkness. Farewell, little "I," whom I have lost and whom I shall regret forever, if I do not find you again, embellished, in my son.

9. The Forest of Myrtles

I had been a very intelligent child, but, at about seventeen, I became stupid. My timidity was such then that I could neither bow nor seat myself in company without having sweat dampening my brow. The presence of women threw me into a sort of bewilderment. I observed to the letter the precept from the Imitation of Christ which I had been taught in I do not know what low grade and which I had remembered because the verses, which are from Corneille, had seemed bizarre to me:

Flee with great care the society of women;
Thine enemy by that can know thy weakness.
Recommend as a whole to the bounties of the Most High
Those whose virtues embellish their souls,
And, without ever seeing one without a prompt farewell,
Love them all, but in God.

I followed the advice of the old mystical monk; but if I followed it, it was quite in spite of myself. I should have liked to see women with a farewell less prompt.

Among my mother's friends, there was one near whom I should especially have liked to remain and talk for a long time. That was the window of a pianist, Adolphe Gance, who had died young and famous. She was named Alice. I had never really seen well either her hair, or her eyes or her teeth . . . How can one see well that which floats, shines, glitters, dazzles? but she seemed more beautiful to me than a dream and of a supernatural brilliance. My mother had the habit of saying that Mme. Gance's features, examined in detail, had nothing extraordinary about them. Each time that my mother expressed this feeling, my father would shake his head incredulously. That is because he doubtless did as I did, this excellent father; he did not examine Mme Gance's features in detail. And, whatever the details might be, the total effect was charming. Do not believe Mama; I assure you that Mme Gance was beautiful. Mme Gance attracted me: beauty is a sweet thing; Mme Gance frightened me: beauty is a terrible thing.

One evening while my father was receiving some people, Mme. Gance entered the drawing room with an air of kindness that encouraged me a little. She sometimes assumed, in the midst of men, the air of a queen who throws food to little birds. Then, suddenly, she would affect a haughty pose; her face would freeze and she would wave her perfumed handkerchief as if to chase far away the disgust which en-

veloped her. I did not understand that. I understand it perfectly today: Mme Gance was a coquette, that's all.

I told you then that this evening as she entered the drawing room, she cast upon everyone, even the humblest, who was I, some crumb of her smile. I did not take my eyes off her,* and I thought that I surprised an expression of sadness in her beautiful eyes; I was upset by it. It was because, you see, I was a good soul. She played one of Chopin's nocturnes; I had never heard anything so beautiful. I thought I felt Alice's fingers themselves, those long white fingers, the rings of which she had just taken off, touch my ears lightly with a heavenly caress.

When she had finished, I went instinctively and without thinking about it to take her back to her seat, and to sit down beside her. As I smelled her perfumes, I closed my eyes. She asked me if I liked music; her voice made me shiver. I opened my eyes and I saw that she was looking at me; that look was my downfall.†

"Yes, sir," I answered in my confusion. . . .

Since the earth did not open at this moment to swallow me up, it is because nature is indifferent to mankind's most ardent prayers.

I spent the night in my room, calling myself idiot and brute, and punching myself in the face. In the morning, after having thought it over for a long time, I was not reconciled with myself. I said to myself: "To wish to tell a woman that she is beautiful, that she is more than beautiful, and that she knows how to draw sighs, sobs, and real tears from the piano, and not to be able to say anything but those two words, "Yes, sir," is to be deprived more than is reasonable of the gift of expressing one's thought. Pierre Nozière, you are a cripple, go hide yourself!

Alas! I could not even hide myself completely. I had to

*Literally: I did not leave her in look. †Literally: That look lost me.

appear in school, at meals, on walks, I hid my arms, my legs, my neck, as I could. I was still seen, and I was quite unhappy. With my comrades, I at least had the resource of giving and receiving punches; that is an attitude, indeed. But with my mother's friends, I was pitiable. I felt the excellence of that precept from the Imitation:

Flee with great care the society of women.

"What sound advice," I said to myself. "If I had fled from Mme Gance that fateful evening, when, as she played a nocturne with so much poetry, she caused inexpressible thrills to pass into the air; if I had fled from her then, she would not have said to me, 'Do you like music?' and I should not have answered her, 'Yes, sir'."

These two words, "Yes, sir," rang in my ears incessantly. The memory of them was always present to me, or rather, by a horrible phenomena of consciousness, it seemed to me that, time suddenly having stopped, I remained indefinitely at the instant when that irreparable speech, "Yes, sir," had been spoken. It was not remorse which tortured me. Remorse is sweet compared to what I felt. I remained in gloomy melancholy for six weeks, at the end of which even my parents noticed that I was an imbecile.

What completed my imbecility was that I had as much boldness of mind as I had timidity of manner. Ordinarily, the intelligence of young people is severe. Mine was inflexible. I thought I possessed the truth. I was violent and revolutionary, when I was alone.

Alone, what a rogue, what a he-man I was! I have quite changed since then. Now I am not too much afraid of my contemporaries. I put myself as much as possible between those who have more intelligence than I and those who have less, and I count on the indulgence of the first. On the other hand, I am no longer too confident face to face with myself. . . . But I am telling you a story about my seventeenth year. You can

imagine that then this mingled audacity and timidity made me a completely absurd creature.

Six months after the frightful adventure which I have told you about, my rhetoric studies having terminated with some honor, my father sent me to spend the vacation in the fresh air. He recommended me to one of the humblest and one of the worthiest of his associates, an old country doctor, who practiced at Saint-Patrice.

There I went. Saint-Patrice is a little village on the Norman coast, in back of which is a forest, and which slopes gently to a sandy beach, hemmed in by two cliffs. The sea, which I saw for the first time, and the forest, whose calm was so sweet, at first produced in me a sort of rapture. The vagueness of the waters and the foliage was in harmony with the vagueness of my soul. I rode horseback in the forest; I rolled about half naked on the beach, full of desire for something unknown which I sensed everywhere and found nowhere.

Alone all day, I wept without cause; it often happened that suddenly I would feel my heart swell up so hard that I thought I would die. In a word, I felt a great uneasiness; but is there in this world a calm which is worth the inquietude I felt? No. I call to witness the cliff on which I used to go to see the sun set in the sea, nothing is worth the sorrow with which I was then tormented, nothing is equal to men's first dreams! If desire embellishes all things upon which it rests, the desire for the unknown embellishes the whole universe.

I have always had, with enough awareness, certain strange innocences. I should perhaps have been ignorant of the cause of my uneasiness and my vague desires for many days more. But a poet revealed it to me.

From school days, I had developed a taste for poets which I have fortunately retained. At seventeen, I adored Virgil, and I understood him almost as well as if my teachers had not explained him to me. During vacation, I always had a Virgil in

my pocket. It was a cheap little English Virgil by Bliss; I still have it. I keep it as carefully as it is possible for me to keep anything; each time that I open it, dried flowers fall out of it. The oldest of these flowers come from the forest at Saint Patrice where I was so happy and so unhappy at seventeen.

Now, one day that I was spending alone at the edge of this forest, breathing in with delight the odor of the newly mown hay, while the wind which was blowing from the sea put salt on my lips, I felt an unconquerable feeling of weariness, I sat down on the ground and looked for a long time at the clouds in the sky.

Then, by habit, I opened my Virgil and read:

‘Hic, quos durus amor. . . .’

“There, those whom a pitiless love has caused to die in a cruel languor, so, hidden in mysterious paths, and a forest of myrtles casts its shade about. . . .”

“And the forest of myrtles casts its shade. . . .” Oh! I knew this forest of myrtles; I had it within me in its entirety. But I did not know its name. Virgil had just revealed to me the cause of my sorrow. Thanks to him, I knew that I was in love.

But I did not yet know whom I loved. That was revealed to me the following winter, when I saw Mme Gance again. You are doubtless more perspicacious than I was. You guessed it, it was Alice I loved. Imagine that fatality! I loved exactly the woman before whom I had covered myself with ridicule and who must have thought worse than badly of me. That was something about which to despair. But then despair was out of style; by having made too much use of it, our fathers had worn it out. I did nothing terrible nor great. I did not go to hide beneath the ruined arches of an old cloister; I did not lead my melancholy about in the deserts; I did not call upon the north winds. I was simply very unhappy, and passed my examinations for the baccalaureate.

Even my happiness was cruel; it was seeing and hearing Alice, and thinking: "She is the only woman in the world whom I could love; I am the only man whom she could not endure." When she played from music at the piano, I would turn the pages, looking at the fine hairs which played about her white neck. But in order not to expose myself to saying "Yes, sir" to her again, I vowed not to say a word to her any more. Changes took place soon after in my life and I lost sight of Alice without having broken my oath.

I found Mme Gance again at a watering-place in the mountains this summer. A half-century today weighs upon the beauty which gave me my first uneasinesses, and the most delicious ones. But this ruined beauty still has grace. As a grey-headed man, I myself relieved myself of the vow of my adolescence.

"Good day, Madame," I said to Mme Gance.

And this time, alas! the emotion of youthful years disturbed neither my look nor my voice.

She recognized me without too much difficulty. Our memories united us, and we helped each other to enliven the monotonous life of the hotel by conversations. Soon new bonds were formed of themselves between us, and these bonds will be only too solid: it is the community of wearinesses and sorrows which forms them. We talked every morning, on a green bench, in the sun, about our rheumatisms and our bereavements. It was material for long talks. To amuse ourselves, we mixed the past with the present.

"How beautiful you were, Madame," I said one day, "and how much admired!"

"It is true," she answered me smilingly. "I can say it, now that I am an old woman; I was pleasing. This memory consoles me for growing old. I have been the object of rather flattering homages. But I shall really surprise you if I tell

you which of all the homages was the one that touched me most."

"I am curious to know it."

"Well, then I am going to tell you about it. One evening (it was quite a long time ago) a young high school boy felt such a disturbance as he looked at me that he answered, "Yes, sir" to a question I asked him. There is no mark of admiration which might have flattered me as much nor contented me more than this "Yes, sir," and the air with which it was said. I do not know what kept me from kissing that youngster on both cheeks."

10. *The Ghost*

An extraordinary adventure happened to me in my twentieth year. My father having sent me to lower Maine to take care of a family business matter, I departed from the pretty little village of Ernée one afternoon to go, seven leagues from there, to visit, in the poor parish of Saint Jean, the house, now deserted, which sheltered my father's family for more than two hundred years. It was the beginning of December.* It had been snowing since morning. The road, which made its way between quickset hedges, was broken up in many places, and we had a great deal of trouble, my horse and I, avoiding the mudholes.

But, about five or six kilometers from Saint Jean, I found it better, and, despite the furious wind which arose and the snow which was lashing my face, I broke into a gallop. The trees which bordered the road flew past beside me like deformed and mournful shadows in the night. They were horrible, those black trees, heads cut off, covered with tumors and wounds, arms twisted. They are called "runts" in lower Maine. They gave me a kind of fright, because of what a vicar from Saint Marcel in Ernée had told me the day be-

*Literally: One was entering into December

fore. One of these trees, the vicar had told me, one of these old mutilated trees of the Grove, a chestnut tree beheaded for more than two hundred years and hollow as a tower, had been split from top to bottom by lightning on February 24, 1849. Then through the hole, there was seen within the skeleton of a man who was standing up, a gun and a rosary beside him. On a watch found at this man's feet was the name of Claude Nozière. This Claude, my father's great-uncle, was during his lifetime a smuggler and highwayman. In 1794, he took part in the insurrection of the Chouans, in the troop of Treton, who was nicknamed Silver-Leg. Seriously wounded, pursued, hunted down by the revolutionaries, he went to hide and to die in the hollow of this "runt." Neither friends nor enemies knew what had become of him; and it was half a century after his death that the old Chouan was exhumed by a thunderbolt.

I was thinking of him, as I saw the "runts" flying past on both sides of the road, and I increased my horse's gait. It was pitch dark when I reached Saint Jean.

I entered the inn, whose signboard was clanking its chain mournfully in the wind, in the darkness. And, after having taken my horse to the stable myself, I entered the low room and threw myself into an old wing chair, in the fireplace corner. While I was thus warming myself, I could see the face of my hostess in the lamplight. It was that of a horrible old woman. On her face, already covered with a bit of the grave, one saw nothing but an eaten-away nose and dead eyes with blood-red lids. She examined me suspiciously, as a stranger. That is why I told her, to reassure her, my name, which she should have known well. She answered, shaking her head, that there were no more Nozières. However, she consented to get supper ready for me. She threw a faggot into the fireplace and went out.

I was sad and tired, and tormented by an unspeakable

anguish. Gloomy and violent imaginings assailed me. I dozed off for a moment; but, in my half sleep, I continued to hear in the fireplace the groanings of the wind whose gusts blew cinders from the hearth upon my boots.

When, at the end of several minutes, I opened my eyes again, I saw what I shall never forget, I saw distinctly, at the back of the room, on a whitewashed wall, a motionless shadow; it was the shadow of a young girl. The profile was so sweet, so pure, and so charming, that I felt, as I looked at it, all my fatigue and all my sadness melting away in a delightful feeling of admiration.

I contemplated her, it seems to me, for a minute; it is always possible that my rapture might have been more or less long, for I have no means of estimating its real duration. Then I turned my head to see her who made such a beautiful shadow. There was no one in the room . . . no one but the old tavern-keeper, busy laying a white cloth on the table.

Again I looked at the wall; the shadow was no longer there.

Then something like a pang of love siezed my heart, and the loss which I had just sustained left me desolate.

I reflected for a few seconds, with complete lucidity, then: "Granny!" I said, "Granny! then who was there just now?"

My hostess, astonished, said that she had seen no one.

I ran to the door. The snow, which was falling thickly, covered the ground, and no foot was marked in the snow.

"Granny, are you sure that there is no woman in the house?"

She answered that there was only she.

"But that shadow?" I exclaimed.

She did not answer.

Then I tried to determine, according to the principles of exact physical laws, the position of the body whose shadow I had seen, and, pointing out this place with my finger: "She was there, there, I tell you."

The old woman drew near, a candle in her hand, fixed

her horrible, expressionless eyes on me, then: "I see now," she said, "that you are not deceiving me and that you are really a Nozière. Would you not be the son of Jean, the doctor, of Paris? I knew his uncle, the young man, René. He, too, saw a woman whom no one saw. It must be thought that it is a punishment from God upon the whole family for the sin of Claude the Chouan, who lost his soul."

"Are you speaking," I said to her, "of Claude, whose skeleton was found in the hollow trunk of a 'runt,' with a gun and a rosary?"

"My young sir, the rosary was of no use to him. He was damned because of a woman."

The old woman did not tell me anything more. I could hardly taste the bread, the eggs, the bacon, and the cider, with which she served me. My eyes kept turning ceaselessly toward the wall where I had seen the shadow. Oh! I had indeed seen it! It was clearer and sharper than a shadow should have been, which was produced naturally by the trembling light of the fireplace and the smoky flame of a candle.

The next day I visited the deserted house where Claude and René had lived in their time; I went all through the countryside, I questioned the cure; but I learned nothing which could make me know anything about the girl whose shadow I had seen.

Even today, I do not know if the old tavern-keeper is to be believed. I do not know if some phantom used to visit, in the harsh solitude of the Grove, the peasants from whom I am descended, and if the hereditary Shadow, which haunted my proud and mystical forebears, had not shown itself with a new grace to their dreamy child.

Did I see in the inn at Saint Jean the familiar spirit of the Nozieres, or rather, was it not announced to me, on that winter night, that my share of the things of this world would be the best, and that indulgent nature had granted me the dearest of her gifts, the gift of dreams?

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